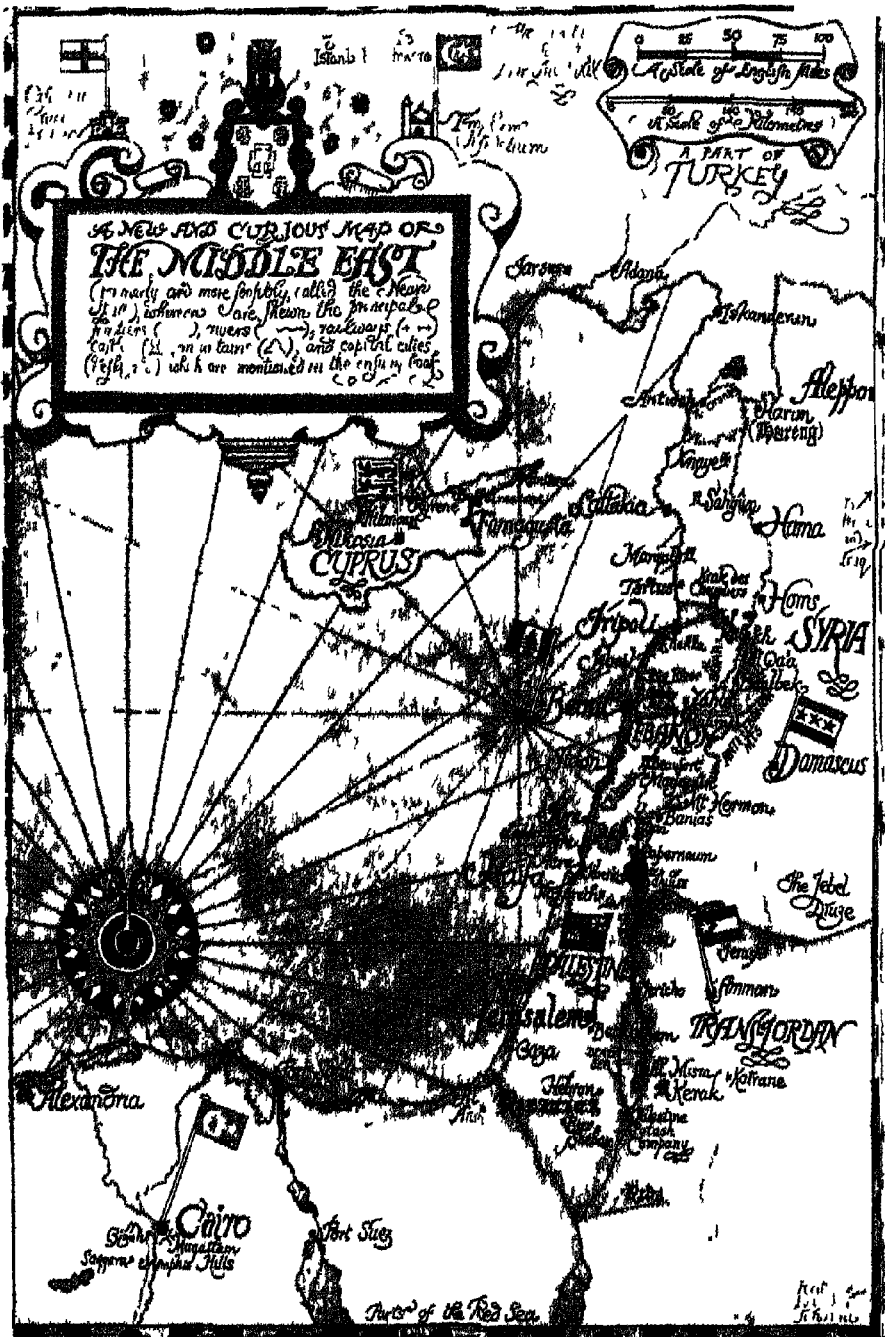




## TIME IN THE EAST



THE MIDDLE EAST

# TIME IN THE EAST

An Entertainment

BY

EVAN JOHN

WITH COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



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WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD  
LONDON                    ::                    TORONTO



PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE WINDMILL PRESS  
KINGSWOOD, SURREY

DEDICATED ON MY RETURN TO ENGLAND  
TO THOSE WHO WENT EAST  
TO FIGHT AND NOT TO WRITE  
AND WILL NOT NOW RETURN

"I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall the sword sleep in my hand."



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## NOTE ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The pictures in this book are the somewhat inexperienced work of the author. They are chosen on the same principles as appear to guide the selection of illustrations for popular, semi-scientific books on history, literature and art, viz., so as to have little or nothing to do with the text and to be occasionally at variance with it. This (besides saving editors and publishers a lot of trouble and money) has the advantage of keeping the reader continually guessing, and so in a properly humble frame of mind.

I have added the further intimidation of a symbolic colour-scheme, based on that of the only military decoration with which I am entitled to beribbon my khaki, and of models all chosen (for no good reason) from the late eighteenth, and early nineteenth century.

But the chief motives for adding illustrations to the book are the hope of inducing inquisitive purchasers to buy something they might otherwise pass over in the bookshops, and the desire to provide them, in return for their money, with some of the entertainment they may not be able to discern in the text.

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## PRELUDE

AL MISRA,  
TRANSJORDANIA,  
September, 1943.

"A GOOD BOOK," said Dr. Johnson, "must help us either to enjoy life, or to endure it." If mine should fail to do either, it will not be for want of good-will or effort on my part. For the moment I am finding Life abundantly enjoyable, and would dearly love to communicate some of that joy to others. If I have to speak of misfortunes too, I would be proud indeed if anyone was enabled to endure his own with one jot more patience or courage because of anything I have said in this book.

It is half-finished already, and its tattered manuscript is making a most unmilitary bulge in the Army haversack that lies beside my chair on the stone floor. But it still lacks introduction or prelude, and unless I settle down here and now to write one, by the light of a smoky oil-lamp, in the guard-room of this Arab Legion fort, it may have to go to the publisher naked and unexplained.

There is not very much to say about the fort. Outside, it resembles a Hollywood set for some film like *Beau Geste*, except that it seems to me a trifle less solid or bullet-proof. Inside, it is stuffy and murky, hardly the place one would choose for literary composition: but the wind having listed, I must take advantage of its blowing.

There is a little more to say about Al Misra, the place which the fort was built to guard; but for the moment I will confine myself to remarking that it is an unexpectedly fertile patch on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, isolated from other fertilities, and best reached by a very bumpy road from Kerak of Moab, leading through gorges of tortured rock whose shapes beggar the nightmares of Gustave Doré.

How I came to be here is nobody's business but my own. A closer acquaintance with the *Manual of Military Law* (a book for which I retain a great respect, based largely on ignorance) might suggest crushing penalties for such a mixture of truancy, forgery, and impudence as has enabled me to fill the last thirty-six hours with one of the most interesting journeys of my life. I started from Jerusalem yesterday, just before a very chilly dawn, descended in a post-lorry to



the Jordan valley, and so up again, by green slopes to more arid heights, until I was decanted in the town of Amman, capital of Trans-jordania. Here I enquired how long it would take me to reach Kerak (which I was determined to see) and was met on all sides with the obstinately-repeated answer that it would take as long as Allah willed. Allah willed that I should jog all day, in an over-crowded taxi, along the desert tracks that run parallel to the once-Lawrence-scarred railway to Mecca: that we should turn westward at Katrané on to something more like a road: and that we should reach Kerak just in time to see its astonishing battlements printing their silhouette against the sunset:—a sight to gladden the most jaded eyes.

I slept soundly there last night, in the guest-room of an Italian convent. I spent this morning happily scrambling among the ruins of two castles, and trying to guess what proportion of their walls were standing in the days when that old reprobate, Renaud de Châtillon, was Seigneur of Kerak, Lord and bully of all Oultre-Jourdan and Proctor for the Crusaders' Kingdom of Jerusalem. Thence the Arab Legion shepherded me through the gorges, and is now providing me with a roof to sleep on, when I have done scribbling at this trestle-table by the light of the exasperatingly inadequate oil-lamp.

How I am to get back to duty has now ceased to be my business. I have handed the difficult next stage over to the Palestine Potassium Company, the efficient Jewish concern which extracts such wealth as can be extracted from the shores of the Dead Sea. Renewed impudence secured the despatch of a telegram to that long-suffering body, requesting it to divert its midnight convoy of tugs and barges to the Al Misra landing-stage, pick me up there at 3 a.m., and get me back, by water and motor-car, to the City of Jerusalem. If Jehovah is as propitious as Allah has been, another twenty-four hours should see me back in my office at Beirut, facing a justly-irritated but probably-circumventable C.O.

It was said of the late and much-lamented Humbert Wolfe, by a friend no less witty than himself, that, by working as a Civil Servant in Whitehall and writing his verses in Government time, he conferred a double benefit on the public: we got some excellent poetry, and, during that time, we were not governed. I am not so conceited as to think my own literary products of the same vintage as his: but I can at least boast that in collecting materials for this book I have consumed much time which would otherwise have been devoted to

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clogging the Wheels of War with more and more of that paper which at times threatens to bring them to a standstill.

It remains to be seen whether the Wheels of Peace will run any the smoother, or more to the benefit of Mankind, for the inevitable avalanche of books, the innumerable chatty reminiscences of the Middle East, which may be already hurtling at the poor public's head before I can induce a publisher to add mine to their number. They will unavoidably be written (as I too must write) with a certain emphasis on the first person singular; and, though some of them will undoubtedly be rubbish, others may be expected to come from men and women whose first person singular commands, and deserves, a great deal more attention than my own. But I, too, have a tale to tell, and it may be of service to others.

If I began it with this afternoon's doings, it would include one of the most foolish actions I have ever committed in my life. I was down at Al Misra, by the shore. I was hot and dusty. The water looked blue and inviting. I took off my clothes, ran along the jetty, and took a header into the Dead Sea.

The sensations of the first half-second were rather pleasant. It was like being smoothly wrapped in a cool garment of soft, caressing silk. But, before I had time to enjoy the feeling properly, the salt was penetrating my shut lips, pouring down my ears into my throat and making my eyes sting like ten thousand jelly-fish. I struggled to the surface, coughing my lungs up and feeling as if my whole skull would burst. I clambered, more dead than alive, back on the jetty and staggered along it to the shore. I stuttered to a Beduin family that stood by and grinned, gesticulating that I wanted fresh water poured over my aching head. They complied, douching me with generous streams that had no effect for a long time. I had been at most five to ten seconds in my super-saline bath. It was a good three-quarters of an hour before I felt like a human being again.

Such incidents befall the unwary, and the unwary have only themselves to blame. I have had enough and to spare of them, and the temporary damage has been sometimes physical, sometimes in other spheres. But I have always found life, even at its most painful, to be full of queer and absorbing interests, and if I can now communicate a tithe of them by means of cold print, I need not doubt of success.

It might be difficult to make a good book out of my pre-war experiences, on which I need only touch lightly before embarking for the East. They had the advantage of variety. When war came,

I had not long been the complacent petty landowner as which I shall be found posing on a later page. I have earned money in an amusing number of ways, from sign-writer and theatrical call-boy to University lecturer. But, if such a life sharpened and enriched the mind a little, it did not include such tests as mould the spirit. I had taken a few risks for fun, but seldom been in danger of violent death. I had lived on thirty-five shillings a week, but never had to struggle against a crippling poverty. I remained, by the more drastic standards of present war-time, an observer and an amateur. . . .

A dog has begun to bark outside. He may wake the guard. I had better go and see what is the matter. It will give me another chance to observe the Dead Sea, which is a fine sight by moonlight, and a few minutes' respite from writing will ease my cramped hand.

. . . The dog was easily quieted. He was barking, as is the way of dogs, at nothing in particular—unless it was the moon or my Beduin friends encamped half a mile away on the beach. And it was certainly worth while getting another glimpse of that lovely stretch of silvered water, before returning to my trestle table and my uninspiring chronicle.

I should perhaps mention that I was born and brought up in great comfort, the pre-1914 comfort that was the equivalent of today's luxury, and that I received the conventional education, mainly in Greek, Latin and History, which can still be had at those schools and universities whose traditions are deeply embedded in the Middle Ages. When I began to look round me and earn a living in the modern world, I naturally doubted whether my training had been for the best. In the light of twenty years' experience and observation, most of my doubts have vanished. I am more than grateful to my father for the sound common sense that dictated my studies. I am now prepared to take up the cudgels (as I intend to do on a later page) in defence of Classical Education. My opinion may seem unpalatable, or even contemptible, to nine-tenths of my readers: but they will at least have the fun of thinking up arguments to crush me, and the pleasure that can always be derived from a sense of superiority.

Being a rolling stone, I gathered little of the mossy encumbrance of money until I was approaching my forties. By then, I had seen life from a number of unusual angles and drawn from it a number of conclusions with which few of my neighbours seemed to agree. My chief delight has always been in travel, and I am now thankful

that I always insisted on travelling rough. I used to wonder why those who prefer first-class hotels to wayside taverns, barns and haystacks, must go so far afield to purchase, in Madrid or New York or Tokyo, that standardized comfort which nowadays hardly differs in any quarter of the world and can easily be secured at Brighton. I feel that I learnt much about both places and people which can be learnt in no other way—even if it involved eating strange food and sometimes sleeping in the company of strange insects. I saw unforgettable sights such as cannot be seen from motor-roads, and scrambled up mountains unlisted in the Alpine guides, from Corsican Monte d'Oro (where I broke my leg) to the Spanish Pyrenees (where I was arrested as a spy). I acquired, in fact, the taste for unconventional expeditions that have now landed me at Al Mista, as well as in other spots of the Middle East that escape the visits of most travellers.

Meanwhile (and I am still speaking of pre-war experiences), I met few celebrities, and found most of those few uninteresting. My photograph has never been in the *Tatler*, nor my foot in Buckingham Palace. I took no part in the Spanish Civil War. I have not 'sailed before the mast'. I have never seen a ghost. I am respectably and (till parted by war) most happily married. In any case, I would not write anything of my own love affairs: I was brought up in that dwindling tradition which forbids the making of literary capital (and financial lucre) out of things that should surely be the inalienable property of two persons and two persons only.

Of what, then, am I hoping to make a book?

If you are not bored or repelled by what you have already read, may I ask you to read a little further and discover? I hope you will find interest, and even the promise of some excitement, though I cannot yet know whether that promise will be fulfilled. By this dim lamplight I can hardly decipher my own handwriting, and I certainly cannot read the secrets of the unwritten future. But I would like to share with you some of the things which I have found most absorbing during my Time in the East. I would like to re-tell a few tales from the Past of those countries in which I have been a wanderer, and submit to your judgment a few thoughts about the action of historic Time in the East. We may be able to discuss a few books and poems, that are relevant to the main theme. You may like to examine such few scraps of wisdom as I may imagine myself to have picked up in forty checkered years. I will put all this into such good English as

a classic-bred pedant can contrive to write. Above all—and I trust I shall never forget my principal duty—I will do my best to keep you entertained. Shakespeare could say no more.

Now may I go to bed?

We are more than two thousand feet here below the level of all reasonable seas, and the night is hot and heavy. My eyes are tired, and my lamp gutters lower and lower. It is the season of Ramadan, of daylong fasting, and after eating, and sharing with me, a somewhat unconventional sunset meal, my good hosts of the Arab Legion are now snoring on the roof of the fort. I would like to join them and sleep a few hours, before it is time to mount a horse and ride down to the landing-stage, whither Potash and Perlmutter are (I hope) kindly diverting their boat for my benefit. So, by your leave, I will say another kind word or two to the dog, climb the theatrical little stairway that leads up to the ramparts, and seek my pile of borrowed blankets, laid out beneath the stars.

## CHAPTER ONE

# STACCATO

"*Hor.* O Day and Night, but this is wondrous strange!  
"*Ham.* And therefore, as a stranger, *give it welcome.*"  
HAMLET 1. 5 164-5.

### I. ODDITIES

THERE is a character in Chekov's lovely masterpiece, *The Cherry Orchard*, who earns the nickname of 'Twenty-Two Misfortunes' from the minor mishaps which overtake him every hour of the day. I would certainly not claim any such unenviable distinction as Epihodov's: but I sometimes think that my twin angels are for ever devising curiosities for my benefit or annoyance, trifling oddities in the times of peace, weirder surprises since 1939. I wonder how many University undergraduates have narrowly escaped having an ear cut off by the sword of an over-excited Japanese naval officer in a small bedsitter in North Oxford: how many holiday-makers have gone into a shop to have their photographs taken (as I did in Dinard) and been shown the actual severed head of Henry of Navarre, looking rather like a desiccated cabbage: how many visitors to Jerusalem have there been presented by an ex-Buddhist priest with a two-volumed history of Norway. These things seem to happen naturally to me, and it is only when I come to think over them afterwards that I realize how queer they are.\*

It hardly affects the matter that they are now happening to me in distant parts of the earth. There are men who can live out their lives in Wimbledon or Worthing and have the most entertaining experiences to recount. There are others who spend their time between Peking, Pernambuco and Potsdam, but remain the club bores from whom all flee. There is so little in travel, and so much in the star under which the traveller was born.

I have no travel-book to write. I have never made a systematic tour of the places that are starred in guide-books. I have had no

\* Henry of Navarre's head was hacked off his body by the mob that desecrated the Royal tombs of France during the Revolution. My chance acquaintance at Dinard had published many monographs (and photographs) to prove that it had, by devious routes, come into his possession.

chance to follow, by motor-car, in the Footsteps of the Master: if I had, I could not write so good a book about it. I cannot even add to the War-books. I have already rushed into print with a much-censored diary of the only time I heard machine-guns fired in anger. If I have got about a bit in the Middle East, it has not been as a soldier, but as a peripatetic bureaucrat in battledress. I can only add that this has not been entirely through cowardice, nor entirely by my own choice.

In the last, the Four Years War of 1914-18, it was calculated that for every man exposed to danger and hardship in the Front Line, there were nine living in comparative comfort and safety, supplying him with food, clothes, ammunition, equipment or intelligence, waiting to rebandage him when he arrived wounded at the base, supervising his meagre pay and slow promotion, arresting him if he got drunk on leave, or making plans for consigning him to a strategically inevitable death. In this War, enormously-multiplied technicalities must have raised the proportion of base-barnacles to a far more fantastic figure. Some of us 'chair-borne' troops can speak of air-raids as an apologetic substitute for battle. Some disdain apology, and strut about in the haughty superiority of extra pay and easy-won pips. Others—and I should like to include myself among them—feel a little uncomfortable about our comfort and security, and even make efforts to put an end to it. Meanwhile we cannot help looking about us and finding much that is strange and interesting in our comparatively cushioned lives. We try to put some of this strangeness and interest into letters to our families at home. And a few of us feel moved to write books about it.

For me, the puppet of oddities, the strangeness is only an intensification of things to which I have long been accustomed. I certainly began to feel that I was leading an unreal life some years before war broke out. I am sure I was not alone in this. I think we were all affected, consciously or unconsciously by the turn that world history was taking, by the astonishing way in which our public affairs were being handled, by the antics of our politicians and other leaders on the lip of an all-too-obvious volcano.

Like all sensible people, I had known that there was a war coming. If I had had no professional connection with politics, I had made a sufficiently systematic study of History to give me some insight into the unchanging forces whereby nations are moved and ruined. I only failed to grasp with what terrifying swiftness the modern

world enabled ancient follies to provoke their inevitable penalty.

I had long wondered how otherwise intelligent people could use the word Disarmament as a synonym for the word Peace, when it seemed to me a direct challenge to battle. And when the policy of Appeasement first wound its slimy coils into the minds of our rulers, it needed little intelligence to see that it must mean appeasement for the unjust and the aggressive, injustice and treachery for the peace-lovers.

The rot started—and could easily have been stopped—over the half-forgotten incident of Mussolini's bombardment of Corfu. It was pretty clear that the dirty work done in the matter of that poor little island must be repeated in a rapidly multiplying series of events until vast territories were involved, and the lives of millions jeopardized.

The worst part of it all was that those who *recognised the danger*—and there were, of course, many who saw it more clearly than I—felt impotent to do anything about it. In the spring of 1939, when I was living in London, I remember making a half-hearted and already belated tour round the government offices where I had acquaintances, asking whether there was anything I could do to serve my country in the approaching crisis. I was naturally fed with bland negatives from every spoon and had to look around me for some humbler way of being useful. In the end I took the line of least resistance and joined the A.R.P.

My experiences were instructive, though hardly encouraging. I was lectured about Poison Gas, shown specimens of Poison Gas, and then lectured about Poison Gas again. I can only remember one out of scores of meetings at which any other subject was mentioned. After talking to a friend of mine in the R.A.F., and another at the Spanish Republican Embassy (where the facts about Barcelona and Guernica were known) I grew so bold as to ask one of our teachers about the effects of High Explosive bombs. My question was received with disapproval, tinged with suspicion of my motives in asking. When the first crisis came (when Hitler had made up his mind to destroy the thousand-year-old frontier of Czecho-Slovakia, and we could not make up our minds whether or not to try and prevent him) I spent a white night 'assembling' gas-masks and fitting them on neighbours, many of whom afterwards found them very handy for the growing of geraniums.

As soon as I had got home and breakfasted, I took matters into my own hands and fitted up the basement of my house, as an air-raid



shelter, with such appliances as I could contrive, impromptu, against collapses, wounds and burial. I began to show it to the householders around me. But my insubordination was soon detected. The A.R.P. got into touch with the Police, and I was forbidden to continue instructing those whose Warden I was supposed to be, on the astonishing ground that my little exhibition might cause a queue in the remote square near Shepherd's Bush which I then inhabited.

It was about this time that I was saying good-bye to London (with little regret) and therefore to A.R.P. (with none). I could not know that the whole organization was to be most drastically overhauled before its true testing-time. I attended a sort of *post-mortem* meeting of our local officials, a banquet of mutual self-congratulation, after the surrender at Munich had temporarily ended the emergency. I sat silently listening to the floods of pompous and flattering oratory without a smile. There was a certain ominous remark echoing in my mind. I had heard it from too many mouths to find it funny. "But it's quite simple. I'm going to stay up at the top of the house, where the gas can't reach me!" I could only make a rough calculation that the sole activity of the A.R.P. in my district—creating a gas-panic which we entirely failed to allay—could only have doubled or trebled the casualties if enemy aeroplanes had indeed swooped upon us. There are times even now, when I find myself wishing I could meet one of the rich men who grew even richer by selling so much anti-gas material to the London County Council, and leaving the men, women and children of the Capital so pitilessly exposed to the real danger. I should like the meeting to take place in a quiet and convenient spot, when I have some heavy instrument in my hands.

I was quitting London because (after writing in my spare time for some twenty years and making during all that period rather less than fifty pounds) I had suddenly gained much more money than was good for me from the proceeds of one historical novel—a species of literature I had hitherto tended to despise. I used it to buy myself an ugly but delightfully situated farmhouse among Chiltern beech-woods.

I began to attempt the probably impossible task of turning myself into a countryman, after nearly forty years of work in towns where the word Country spelt only Holiday. I meanwhile took the obvious step of enlisting as a gunner in the local battery of Territorial Artillery. I seemed to cause some surprise by persisting in my resolve to do so after being told that my age put a Commission out of the

question. Like most Territorials, I did rather more than my statutory one parade per week, and was looking forward to at least a month's practice camp in the summer. Our headquarters, at least, seemed to be alive to the approach of war. But it was to my home that the queerest indications of coming trouble seemed to penetrate. I sat there thinking mainly of the Vicar's next visit, of the laying capacity of my hens, and of my next historical novel. I had no idea in what circumstances it was going to be completed.

The first thing that happened was the arrival of a letter, asking for my help in preventing a man being beheaded in the city of Prague: I was assured he was a good man, and also a good poet, whose violent death would entail a real loss to European literature. A little later, a German liberal found his way up my lane, to stay the night and ask my advice on a political scheme he had on hand. It was no less an undertaking than the restoration of the exiled dynasty of Hapsburg to the throne of a fourth *Reich*. His knowledge of his own people, with their childish susceptibility to titles and banners, had convinced him that this was a far better counter-move to the detestable monarchy of Hitler than the already discredited Parliamentary Democracy.

I knew little enough of Central European politics. I said what I could, sitting beside my beech-log fire and looking out through windows still innocent of black-out, across the moonlit English hay-fields: they had known no war since Oliver battered his way to Dictatorship over the ruins of the Stuart Dynasty—and the ruins of Parliament.

Like most experts, the historian had been caught napping, not merely by the rapidity with which familiar things were developing, but even by the forms they were taking, forms which, in all conscience, should have been easy enough to recognize. If there was no "Take away that Bauble!" when the Reichstag was abolished, it was only because the Nazis preferred the methods of Guy Fawkes. One should have been able to guess that Politics were ripe to recapture their innate theatricality, after the two centuries of sobriety with which they had been invested, at least in England, by Whiggery and the worship of Comfort. The newspaper fuss over the imprisonment of a Captain in the Tower was a mild but fitting prelude to the wilder melodrama to come; it was to culminate in such a magnificent theme for a latter-day Marlowe or Webster as that of Rudolf descending on Scotland from the skies.

I could not see so far. I can only remember that, as I looked out of the window, I seemed to hear, faint but unmistakable, the beating of strange wings above me in the night. Ancient evils were gathering over a foolishly complacent nation, and if any of us had found life dull, and sighed for a return of romance, he was about to find that things pleasant to read about in books can be exceedingly painful in experience.

I remember that my wife and I had about that time been planting daffodils round the edge of the field that lay directly beneath my window. I was reminded of them the other day, when she wrote to me to say they were still flourishing, while our specific flower-garden had long ago been dug up for carrots and cabbages, sinews of domestic war. They even inspired her to write me a poem in which they were described, with that aptness which is itself no mean kind of poetry, as 'Making a poem in a world of prose'. The jealousy of the male, and the still deeper-seated jealousy of the professional writer, incited me to interpolate into her verses a whole stanza of my own:—

'Flowers with which we—before the trumpets sounded,  
Before the flags for battle were unfurled—  
Our little peaceful meadowland surrounded  
In that now lost, irrevocable world.'

It was lost to me quickly, became irrevocable in a flash. The first hint of an agreement between the German and Russian autocrats transferred me from the planting of daffodils to the counting of shells and blankets. My wife was left, as soon as war actually broke out, to fit black crêpe into our windows, and fourteen grumbling evacuees into a house that had recently held four persons and a baby. She mastered her problems sufficiently to leave a well-organized household behind her when she went up to London to work for the B.B.C. I wonder what she would have said if someone had told her, in the days of daffodil-planting, that she would soon be coughing up dust in a swaying studio while an imperturbable little Italian poured anti-Fascist propaganda into a microphone and his countrymen, or their Allies, rained bombs on the building from above.

It is quite impossible to think oneself back into one's pre-war mind. Life has so radically altered that the words 'sober' and 'humdrum' are utterly inadequate to describe how we felt in 1939. I just

cannot imagine what my own answer would have been if some supernatural messenger had come to my farmhouse, before my calling-up, to tell me that I would soon be blowing up a safe with high explosives on an island in the Arctic Circle: that I would play one game of chess with the ex-commander of the Polish Air Force while crossing the Equator in a Belgian ship, and another with a former private of the Royal Greek *Evzones* under the shadow of Rameses II's statue at Memphis: that I would dress up a Turk in a British battle-dress and carpet slippers (no boots would fit) in order to convey him some hundreds of miles in an American aeroplane: that I would eat fried eggs with my fingers as a preliminary to riding a white horse down to the Dead Sea at three in the morning: that I would issue a challenge to a pistol duel and (by God!) mean it: that I would take tea with four unknown Hindus in a Venetian castle, and receive from them a sealed sack marked 'Secret'. Yet all these things have happened to me, and to the same me as sat counting words per page and eggs per hen in my study in Oxfordshire, just over four years ago. We used to talk, in those far-off days, of life being full of surprises. We just hadn't the least idea what the words were going to mean.

## II. ACCELERANDO

I HAVE perhaps exaggerated the regularity of my life in the country during the early part of 1939. It was in fact broken by a journey to Hamburg, where a firm of publishers had produced one of my books in German translation and was forbidden by Nazi regulations to pay the money to me in England. I saw no reason to wait till war came and my royalties were sequestered, to pay for more bombs to be thrown at London: I went and spent it all in three days. I brought back such few things as I thought I could get through the Customs without undue expense, including some paints which came in useful when I went out East. With the rest I painted Hamburg a discreet red, before returning through Holland. I never miss an excuse for a day or two in Holland.

I returned from my trip to resume my duties as a householder and as a Territorial gunner and, in the latter capacity, left home in June. I have not lived there since, save for odd fortnights and week-ends. On the last day of camp, I managed to see in the regimental office a letter making it clear that, though the Unit might be disbanded

for the moment, it must expect to be called up again very soon.

Called up we were, and by abrupt order. I had taken the opportunity to accept a week-end invitation from a fox-hunting squire in Northamptonshire, who had written to say that he liked my books, and would like to see my face. He saw it for dinner on the first night. We had scarcely settled down afterwards to a most interesting conversation on literature, history and politics (in which I found myself frequently out of my depth) when the telephone rang and I immediately felt a presentiment. The receiver was handed to me, and I heard the voice of my Adjutant summoning me to my unimportant duties across four counties.

There was luckily no train that night, and we spent the early hours of the next morning riding round the battlefield of Naseby. I was shown the hedge behind which Okey ensconced his dragoons, and the farm where Charles and Rupert, in flight from the overwhelming Roundheads, changed horses and left saddle and bridle behind—"and they've never called for 'em since!" Then I had to take the train, reached my house for a rapid change into rough khaki, and reported to Headquarters.

It was a strange plunge to take, from a most comfortable home well stocked with books, carpenter's tools and all the delightful paraphernalia which can accumulate in a barn,—a home, too, whence I was monarch of all I surveyed—to the use of such few things as can be crammed into an Army pack (after it has already been filled with military equipment), and to the dependence and subservience that is naturally expected of a gunner in the ranks. But the swift transition was probably a salutary one, and it was not altogether unhappy. It only takes a night or two to get accustomed to sleeping on the bare floor, and I was able to congratulate myself on what my friends had formerly called a pointless refusal to become dependent on creature comforts. I got a good deal of amusement out of all but the most irksome features of military routine, and found it funny rather than bothersome to salute and take orders from boys of half my age and a quarter of my education. The food—at which we kept up the conventional barrage of grumbling—was surprisingly good and plentiful. The only real burden was the work I was doing, or supposed to be doing.

According to the Regimental Register my civil employment was 'writer', and I was therefore assigned to the quartermaster's office,

where I spent ten or twelve hours a day struggling with Army forms which a butchers' or drapers' assistant could have dealt with more efficiently in six. When the manipulation of Words is one's life passion as well as one's profession, one cannot readily take to the daily murder and adultery that must be committed upon them in an Army office, and one has great difficulty in understanding the fruit of similar crimes committed by others. I never got any firm grasp of the difference between a receipt and a voucher. I wasted far more paper, chasing my own tail through innumerable errors, than could have been purchased out of my pay. And if I was instructed to indent for 10 doz. pairs of gloves (woollen), the Regiment was as likely as not to get two gun linings, Mark IV, and a good fat raspberry into the bargain.

England has made a habit, just before all her major wars, of getting herself into a minimum state of preparation: but she had perhaps never done so with so terrifyingly well-prepared an enemy waiting to strike at her most vulnerable centres. War had not yet been declared, and the civilian population, hardly yet awakened from dreams of a false pacifism, was not in a mood to understand the urgency. To us, who were part of the Anti-Aircraft Defences, it was quite unmistakable. The need for haste and accuracy was pressing, and I found my own deficiencies a constant nightmare.

There were of course reliefs, in the form of the more understandable 'Fatigues' in which I was called upon to join—until I unfortunately acquired the single stripe which earmarked me for office work alone. But it had not yet been bestowed on me on a certain Sunday morning when we were washing down the officers' cars on the asphalt back-yard of a suburban drill-hall. We dropped hose and sponge to crowd to an open window whence the radio news was audible. We were still hoping against hope that it was going to tell us that the unavoidable would somehow be avoided. All we heard was the uninspiring voice of Mr. Neville Chamberlain, bleating that it had already happened. It was quickly followed by the ominous wail of the sirens, blasting away, and for ever, the wishful thinking of some twenty years.

### III. RANKS

My somewhat farcical performances as a Quartermaster's clerk lasted until Christmas, when I did, by the way, manage to turn out four

lines of real writing. They were a (rejected) quatrain for the Regimental Christmas card:—

To show that even in times of Hate  
Our Loves and Friendships need not cease,  
Nor we who trade in War forget  
The Birthday of the Prince of Peace.

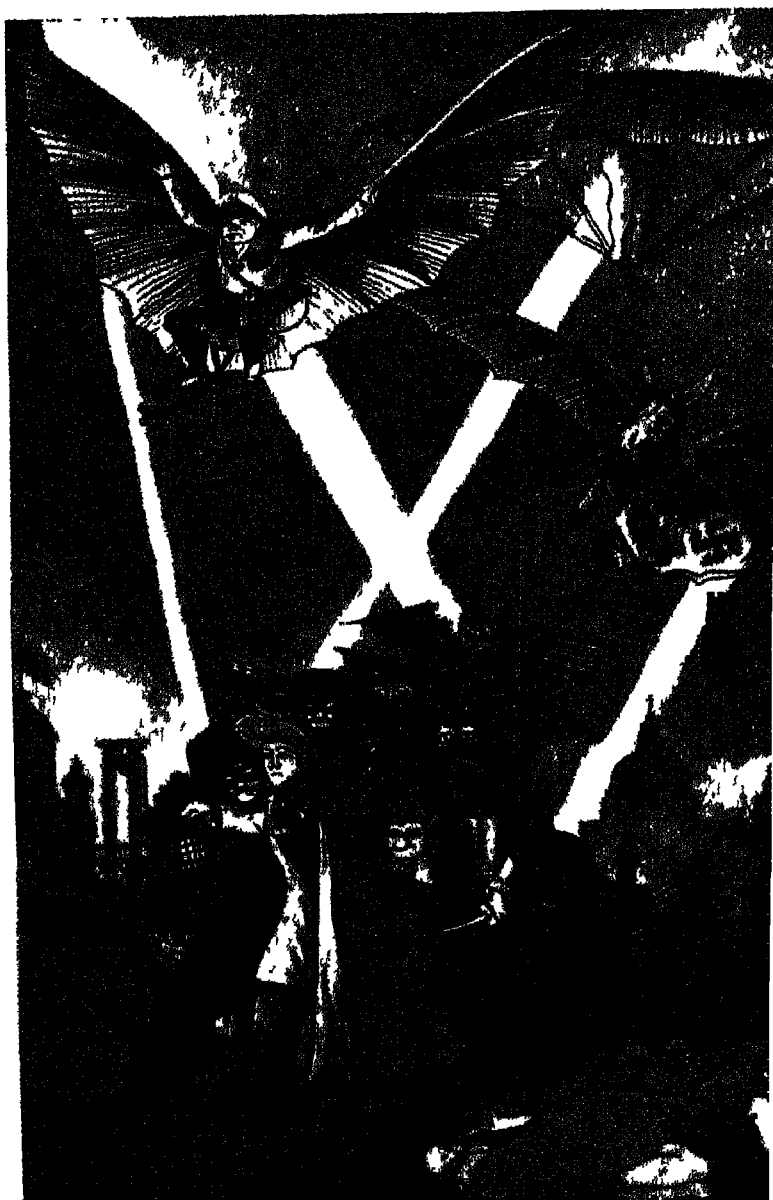
They naturally had to give way to words which emphasized that Christmas was not so much a religious festival as a day on which large quantities of food and drink can be consumed.

Round about this New Year, I asked for, and was given, another job. I was certainly happier, and I think I was more useful, as batman to the Regimental Doctor. He was a man of simple habits, and I spent far less time battling than I did as a Red Cross orderly. I learnt and unlearnt a certain amount about Medicine, and a great deal about Human Nature—a subject whose mysteries I thought I had unravelled at the age of 25, though now, at 43, I find them completely incomprehensible. My best lessons were learnt during the influenza epidemic which put all the R.A.M.C. personnel to bed and left me with forty patients to nurse, feed, clean, and keep cheerful. I discovered the interesting fact that when one has washed the crockery for forty persons, it is just about time to start preparing their next meal, leaving little space for any sleight of hand with the thermometer or accurate apportionment of medicines. The result was some weeks of not unhappy 14- and 16-hour days on my feet, ending with a bout of blood poisoning which put me to bed just as the Red Cross men were emerging from it.

It was a little later that I began to find two great stand-bys. One was my friendship with a Scottish veteran—inevitably known as 'Mac'—who had fought through the early part of the last war, and spent the second half of it tending horribly wounded men. He told me that the latter was far the more trying task, forcing one to go down to the very roots of one's own being, and there ask strange questions—perhaps as the sound of an ambulance convoy outside announced to an already exhausted spirit that a fresh load of ghoulishly mangled and yet living human bodies was at the door. In some such circumstances, he told me, he had felt compelled to ask himself what he really believed in, and particularly whether he believed in a God. He found that the answer was in the affirmative. The Scots retain a curiously theological way of looking at the world.







BLITZED MONARCH

*With apologies*  
*Francisco Goya (1746-182*

The second prop I found was the fact that, after a year's interval, I suddenly began to continue and complete the novel of which I had written a short third before the war. I used my week's leave in September to visit London during the Blitz and share some of its discomforts with my wife whilst arranging about the publication.

It was written round the period of the French Revolution, and was to be illustrated with portraits of the principal historical characters. On one night of my leave, when I was walking across London to take copies of these portraits to Heinemann's, my journey was checkered by the outbreak of a considerable bombardment. One minor result of it was that I dropped and lost the most important of the portraits, that of Gustav III of Sweden, a participant in the Revolution who was so picturesquely assassinated at the masked ball in Stockholm. The book had to appear without a likeness of its most striking and least-known figure. The little incident may perhaps serve as excuse for an illustration in this book; it is a parody of Gustav's contemporary, the Spaniard Goya, who, after painting decorous Court portraits and pastorals for some years, lived to see the French invasion of his country, and to leave us some pretty fancies on the horrors of War.

I had not obtained leave from my Ack-Ack Regiment. I had already said good-bye to that, and found my way, by unusual channels, into a Commando. It was a little ironical that this involved leaving my wife in great danger in London, while I was kept in comfort and cotton-wool among such parts of Scotland as had hardly heard that there was a war being fought. Of the only excitement I saw I have written elsewhere\* and I certainly must not dally over it if I am to bring this chronicle to its eastern goal. The next step in my journey was in March 1941, when His Majesty's Government had apparently repented of its pre-war decision to deny commissions to grey-beards of 40, and sanctioned my own admission to an O.C.T.U. in the pleasant little city of Dunbar.

#### IV. POSTINGS

I WAS lucky in my dates. Dunbar is only pleasant between April and August, when the edge is off the wind. I had warmth and sunshine. They helped me to endure, and occasionally enjoy, the process of being taught the supreme importance of leather-polish and the cere-

\**Lofoten Letter*, Wm. Heinemann. 1941.

monial slow march, with some instruction in modern tactics thrown in. I remember a little of the latter, though three years of intensive warfare have now made them, I imagine, almost as antiquated as the former. I retain a haunting memory of certain grand and seigneurial trees in the park where we did our 'Schemes' and of the schoolboy fun that can be got by invading England at midnight by collapsible boat over the Tweed.

When the time came to distribute us to our various regiments, I was advised to apply for the Intelligence Corps. I was interviewed by a shrewd bald-headed Captain, who flourished at me a series of large cards printed in about twenty European and Oriental languages. He appeared to speak them all himself. He very soon discovered that I could talk bad but fluent French and exceedingly bad Norwegian which was not even fluent. I cannot guess why he passed me through his test.

I was somewhat hazy about the duties of Intelligence Officers. I imagined that mine would have something to do with France or Norway. I took too simple a view of the workings of Higher Authority, and should not have been so surprised at being sent, untrained and in haste, to the Middle East. I can quote far more surprising cases than my own unimportant one. At a time when naval officers speaking Japanese were extremely rare, and extremely badly needed, I knew a couple who had spent two years in Japan with no object except to study the language. One was posted to Syria, the other to Iceland.

But there is a reason for everything, though the reason for my own eastward posting seems inadequate as well as far-fetched. I think it dated back some twenty years, to a certain tea-party in Oxford. On first entering the drawing-room, I barely noticed a shortish, quite unremarkable man, with large, liquid and rather feminine eyes. He did not engage my attention until other guests had palled. Then we talked a little, made a simultaneous departure, and talked a little more on the doorstep, standing under a classic portico that looked out on St. Giles's. Twenty years later, I had only to mention, in some portly presence, that I had met Colonel Lawrence, to find myself posted to the Levant.\*

I cannot say that, apart from the long separation from my wife

\* Many others have been struck by Lawrence's eyes. I once asked Dr. Hogarth whether Lawrence had ever tried feminine disguise for any of his escapades and, if so, with what success. "Yes," he replied, "and it was much too successful. He came running back with half the Turkish camp after him."

and children, I have ever had reason to regret the posting. Here, as everywhere, there have been times of monotony and depression. But there has, for most of us, been far more novelty and variety than in England. And the East is in itself an education. The lessons I have learnt here are particularly valuable to a novelist and playwright, for they deal mostly with universal human things (stripped barer here for inspection than in our own more carefully muffled society), with Wealth and Poverty, Hope and Fear, with the reality of those Hatreds which we at home contrive to ignore, and of that Love whereof we seem a little ashamed.

My first glimpse of the Near East was from the ship outside Port Suez, and it had the conventionally romantic touch in it. It was the sight of white-robed Beduin speeding along the shores on racing camels. I have grown as accustomed to the sight of camels—of the slower, burden-bearing breed—as I once was to that of delivery-vans. But I still find the camels a great deal more interesting. I still find an Oriental street more absorbing and instructive than a London one. It serves so many more purposes besides that of a thoroughfare. Its pavements are used as poultry-runs, barbers' shops, garages, sheep-folds, dancing floors, prie-dieus, wash-houses and particularly dormitories. The richer and more devout folk may keep up the detestable custom of segregating their womenfolk: the general run of the population lives most of its family life in the street. Even in Cairo, at the centre of which the big shops successfully ape those of Paris and the trams are only rarely held up by strings of camels, there is a wider skirting of more primitive streets where the most casual observer can find instruction and amusement.

Between Port Suez and Cairo there is a railway journey which, to the unaccustomed eye, provides at sunset a bewildering series of miracles in light and colour. They have all the dazzling extravagance of photochrome postcards, and only a little of their vulgarity. Indeed the East soon teaches all sensible people to be, as much as possible, out and about when the sun is either rising or setting. It is only at such times that the Nile is really the Nile. It is a unique experience to ride out before dawn along its banks, and watch villages and palm-groves slowly emerging from the scarves of mist. And in the evening, a short walk from the Gezira cocktail-bar will bring you to such a panorama of peaked sails and homing egrets as no artist has ever been able to reproduce, since the first Pharaoh had it painted on his tomb.

Arrival in Cairo revealed the interesting fact that Higher Authority, having sent our party out to work in the Middle East in considerable haste, had no particular work for the majority of us to do. We were left to scrounge for ourselves round the various military offices of the city, and step into any gap we could discover.

It did not take me long to find one, in that quarter barred off from casual pedestrians by high fences of barbed wire and situated, oddly enough, in that quarter of Cairo which has been known from time immemorial as Kasr-al-Dubara, the Castle of String. I got myself lodging near-by, with a bedroom-window view that is surely unmatched in any city of the world (except Edinburgh)—the Cairo citadel outlined against the Muqattam hills. As soon as it grew warm enough, we took our meals on the roof, whence, in the opposite direction, we could see the Pyramids. I have never found a better place in Cairo in which to dine. It was a *pension* kept by a family of Czecho-Slovaks, where nearly all the guests grumbled, and seemed to me to have less cause for grumbling than anywhere I knew. It was staffed with servants from Upper Egypt and the Sudan, where a penny earned and sent home from the capital was worth shillings. The head of them, though he wore a white gown and tarbush, and was a practising Muslim, was in other ways the exact equivalent of the old English butler of comic fiction, both in bland dignity and a suppressed sense of humour towards the childishness of us whom he was supposed to serve. His two weaknesses were photographs of the old mosques of Cairo, and photographs of himself.

The office where I had found employment was a great deal more interesting than the Quartermaster's. It dealt with human beings instead of bedding or ammunition: most of its files contained the life-story (so far as we could come by it!) of some actual man or woman. Most of them were, or were suspected of being, spies and agents of one kind or another. And though, in the flesh, no one can be more boring company than a spy, the tracking and sifting of material about their activities made one of the most fascinating paper-games in the world. I can, naturally, say no more about it. I will even put off for the moment saying anything of those I worked with. My job had one supreme advantage, that it involved an occasional journey. I would like to speak of the first one I took, to Jerusalem, soon after my arrival in the Middle East. And I would like to begin by describing an encounter on the way.

## V. GREENAWAY

I KNOW that the Kingdom of Heaven is in all of us, but I thought I had never seen it shine so unmistakably out of a pair of human eyes. She stood just beneath me as I leaned out of the railway-carriage window—Juliet and Romeo reversed—and she held up to me a bunch of spring flowers. It was just past dawn, and the upland air, to one recently escaped from a large city, was excitingly fresh. I was jaded with an all-night journey, and I longed to stretch my legs by jumping out of the train and taking her hand for a scramble up the flowering rock-garden of a valley along which our self-important little engine had chugged its way throughout the dissolving dusk. But it was almost as good to stand where I was and look down into her eyes. She was clad in bright-coloured clothes, and was surprisingly fair-skinned for a Palestinian. Her attitude seemed all innocence, all welcome for the stranger. For fear of scandal, I should perhaps add that she must have been some five years old.

She stood between two sisters or playfellows on the apology for a platform at this wayside halt. They made an Oriental, slightly picaresque variation on a Kate Greenaway theme, each holding up a little nosegay of flowers. One felt it would be almost blasphemy to offer them money in return. I was no doubt in exalted mood. No man can approach Jerusalem for the first time in his life without some tinge of excitement, perhaps some fear of disappointment. Here, at the last halt, I seemed to have met an earnest that there would be no disappointment: on this rustic threshold to the Holy City, all Heaven seemed to be looking up at me from a little girl's eyes.

And then someone in the train tossed out a copper.

I have in my life seen some pretty rapid human transformations, but I have never seen anything to equal the speed with which those three demure little maidens were changed into repulsive vixens, spitting, scratching, biting and kicking, darting Hell and Hatred at each other out of squint eyes and twisted lips. After a few moments of vicious brawl, my fair-skinned favourite, being the oldest and lustiest, got tight hold of the cash, upped with her red skirt, and secreted the booty in some dirty recess of her petticoats. But she kept a close and malevolent eye fixed on her bleeding and now currish rivals.

I have mentioned Kate Greenaway. The Victorian ladies and

gentlemen who justly admired that half-forgotten artist would probably, had they been in my position, have felt much as I did about the charming preliminary spectacle. But they would have contrived to forget or ignore the unedifying sequel. My own generation, whose outlook crystallized in the nineteen-twenties, found the mere word 'edifying' a joke, and made particular boast of always 'Facing Facts'. By this, I fear, we too often meant exaggerating all unpleasant or uninspiring facts, while we derided or (in the phrase coined at the time) "debunked" anything that seemed to suggest sound fibres in an obviously rotting fabric. This rather shallow candour did some good in destroying, or I should say, re-adjusting, sentimentalities (for we could be woefully sentimental in our own way): but it far outran and outlasted its usefulness. It became a convention, and soon degenerated into an hypocrisy, as odious as the proverbial optimism of our grandfathers. And it has perhaps exercised a more mischievous influence on the development of the human race.

Both, please God, are now dead mutton. The remnants of the pre-1914 world against which Noel Coward and Ernst Remarque led a somewhat belated revolt, are now 'one with Nineveh and Tyre'. The world they tried to substitute for it, that rather rickety structure of moral bravado and material 'safety first', has now crashed about our ears with a most satisfactory completeness. We have a new world to build, and quickly. It would surely be wisest to build it on the indisputable fact that Things in General, and human nature in particular, are a closely-woven texture of incurable evil and unconquerable good. We all conduct our private lives on that fundamental piece of common sense. But when we come to generalize in literature or, still worse, to make political and social plans for our future, we find it most inconvenient, and attempt to hide it in piles of verbiage. There are still idiots speaking of human nature as capable of producing a Utopia on earth once it is freed from a few tyrannies, "dogmas" and vested interests; they have no difficulty in ignoring the fact that those vested interests and tyrannies are themselves the fruit of plain human nature, which, when the old weeds are mown down with the most idealistic thoroughness, will promptly produce a new crop as noxious as the former. There are those, almost equally foolish, who think it amusing to preach despair, and build up a reputation for wisdom by telling each other that it is no good trying to do anything in the face of human stupidity.

The truth is that we do not like facing the truth. We prefer to be led away down by-ways, comforting or cynical. The Devil was once described (in the *patois* of this very country through which my train had now started to chug its way up to Jerusalem) as 'The Father of Lies'. In the ears of our grandparents, he whispered 'Peace, Peace' when there was, or should have been, no peace. In our own he has long chuckled "War, Deceit, Self-Interest," even in those inmost sanctuaries where no one in his senses should fail to recognize the presence of the Selfless and the Divine. Is it too much to hope that we may now find some way to frustrate both his knavish tricks, apply a little common sense to our world, and refuse to regard it either as a near-Paradise or as a near-muckheap? I do not think so. I see signs that we are already beginning to see the obvious.

## VI. HOLY CITY

MILITARY secrecy forbids me to describe my official mission to Jerusalem. Even if there were no pains and penalties in the matter, I have seen enough Intelligence work in this war to know that it has been occasionally handicapped by the idiots who could not resist the temptation to write memoirs about their experience of it in the last. But there is nothing to prevent me from describing the first impact of the city on every sense, as I walked up from the railway station, past the scanty olive-groves and the unexpected little wind-mill. It was still very early in the morning, with bright, cool sunshine on towers and walls and spires. High up on this breezy pocket of mountain, the air has the sparkle of diamonds and a taste like invigorating wine. There is life and colour in everything, and a man must be in a poor way if none of it gets into his heart.

My previous ideas of Jerusalem, like those of many people, were derived from old photographs in school class-rooms. These were presumably taken, and incarcerated in their heavy frames, about the year 1880, as studies in that rich chocolate brown so dear to the age of broughams and mahogany. Long before we knew them, sky and dome and hill-side had faded to a depressing tone of monotonous mud-tint, upon which Time had superimposed a *patina* of fly-blown mould. Nothing could give a child a false impression of the sharp, clear, I would like to say 'modern' colours of Jerusalem, and of the bracing vigour of its air. It seemed to me as if I had been expecting,



since childhood, a dose of thick treacle and bromide, and had suddenly been presented with a bumper of champagne.

The city has certainly nourished some of the most active fanaticism in history, and it is not easy to remain dull and sober in that overstimulating atmosphere, amid that panorama of gold and white and yellow. I am told that some residents fly for their holidays to sleepy and relaxing coast-towns where they can vegetate a little and ease the tension on tightly-strung nerves. There are others who hate the place from the beginning, and flee from it as quickly as possible.

Like all towns, it contains much that is very hateful, and I myself was brought up very quickly against something that I detested. It has no doubt the usual pretentiousness and snobberies, the world-wide cheatings and oppressions. It may have peculiar poisons of its own, and the near future is likely to witness their outbreak and demonstrate their virulence. Jerusalem, twice as old as most European capitals, is now the centre of a new and mortally imperilled state. It cannot afford to be anything except very much alive. Even by material weight and measure, its houses probably contain a most surprising quantity of high explosive, and no police-raid could detect or assay the amount of spiritual gunpowder that may be waiting to explode. Meanwhile it is a great pleasure to arrive there in the morning, and it is good to remember those first impressions which strike so deep, before the mind has had time to re-pad itself against the shocks that the actual town delights to administer to those who visit it in pedantic or sentimental mood.

I had not enough time to make the usual tour of the sights, or to pursue history down some of the fascinating back-alleys. I was busy most of the day, and my rambles were confined to early morning and evening. I rose by twilight to see dawn break over the battlements, and to wander round the quiet courts and pavilions of the Haram al Sharif: to me, who have little taste for Muslim architectures, it yet remains one of the loveliest spots on earth. I find the Mosque of 'Umar, standing where Abraham is supposed to have raised his altar for the sacrifice of his son, one of the few completely satisfying buildings that I know. And through the tiled floor of its interior surges up a great rough platform of the rock that was once the summit of Mount Moriah.\*

\* I fear that those who planned the Edinburgh War Memorial got hold of a 'new idea that was already some twelve hundred years old.

I paid one early morning visit to the Garden Tomb. I believe that all the most trustworthy experts are agreed that it can hardly be the scene of the Resurrection, and that the curiously skull-like hill above it, appropriately placed outside the Damascus Gate, is most unlikely to be Calvary. Helena, mother of the first Christian Emperor of Rome (to whom she gave birth in our own good city of York), was probably right in fixing the two sites near what is now the centre of the town. As Queen Victoria characteristically replied to Gordon's enthusiasm for the Garden Tomb, "We prefer to abide by the decision of our Cousin Helena". But the Empress's choice has now been so overlarded with gilt, wax, veined marble, stucco, and attendants seeking *baksbish*, that it is hardly surprising if most travellers come away from it in disgust. Others find that the thousands, indeed millions of pilgrims who, through sixteen centuries, faced exile, hardship and frequently death in order to kiss these vilely over-decorated shrines, have created a certain atmosphere that triumphs over the tawdriness of the setting. But it is hardly the atmosphere of the First Easter dawn. For that, or for something that must be exceedingly like it, you must go to the little enclosure outside the Damascus gate, where there is still an empty tomb, still a garden, still solitude and peace.

It is harder to give a coherent picture of my evening rambles, since most of them were in the Old City in which one only has to take a few steps to be irretrievably lost. I know no labyrinth to compare with it. One can be sure of finding something interesting at every corner, a piece of Roman masonry, a broken Crusader's archway or some quiet monastic courtyard where doves coo, and a fountain splashes gaily. Every arcade and alley is full of fascinating shops—some of them hardly bigger than cupboards—where the goods sold are actually being made behind the counter, probably amid a huddle of children, geese and sheep. If you go on and turn another corner or two, you will be most unlikely to be able to retrace your steps there, or even to get out of the Old City at all. I suppose the inhabitants must know their way about their tortuously twisted home. But I rather suspect they find it mainly by the smells.

Whether one is or is not a Christian, the historical interest of the place is surely unrivalled. It has been in the hands of so many rulers, Canaanites, Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Mongols, Egyptian-Mamelukes, Ottoman-Turks and British, and most of them have set a considerable mark upon it. It is, too, far less spoilt than one

might imagine by that ugly complex of avarice and vulgarity for which the French invented the appropriately hideous word *Tourisme*. The world has been conspiring to spoil Jerusalem for sixteen hundred years, but has never quite succeeded. In the twelfth century, the Knights Hospitallers had to protect visitors against the rapacity of local landladies and guides: and the shopkeepers who are now importing gimcrack souvenirs, from Cairo or Birmingham, stamped A PRESENT FROM JERUSALEM, were then scouring the dust-heaps for scraps that could be sold as fragments of the True Cross or hairs from John the Baptist's beard. Such trade battens, throughout the ages, on the well-filled pockets of foolish travellers. It is a valuable ally, when Publicity and Profit launch their attack on our own historic cities or 'beauty spots', in order to obliterate their shy spirit. But Jerusalem is not shy. And it has certainly resisted a most remarkably prolonged series of attacks.

It is important, at some time, to get outside it, up to the Mount of Olives, and look from there, across fantastic rocks and solitudes, to the mountains of Moab. Then one can turn back and see Jerusalem with new eyes. Far away to the left is that rocky spur where a little trickle of water suggested to some primitive *shaikh* that he could settle and call himself King of Salem—long ages before David's seasoned guerrillas clambered up to found a new capital for his budding empire. His Temple, and Herod's more expensive substitute for it (garish affairs, by all accounts), occupied the site where now stands the quiet beauty of the *Haram al Sharif*; it is easily discernible from Olivet, its courts no longer echoing to the rattle of hooves from the stables of the Knights Templar. Beneath you lies Gethsemane, still filled with rather arid gardens, and not entirely spoilt by the ecclesiastical white elephants that were dumped among them during the nineteenth century. They still look up much the same slope of bare rock as the sleepy apostles must have seen, by the full moon of Passover, on the night when they fled and left Christ lonely. Along the crest run the walls that Saladin and his sons built, but upon the same line and perhaps in much the same shape as the Roman ramparts. Within them lies Jerusalem, even its old city larger and more sprawling than it was in the days of the crucifixion. But in the dusk, when towers and domes stand peering over the walls, it is perhaps not so very different from the city over which Jesus wept.

But I must not fall into the same historical romanticism as has

afflicted too many writers on Jerusalem. I said that the city itself administers shocks to the unwary, and that I had had one—wholly modern—early on in my visit. Indeed it came to me before I had had a chance to see the depressing theatricalities of the Holy Sepulchre or the souvenir shops of the *Via Dolorosa*. When it came and hit me like a blow, it immediately began, for some reason best known to my Maker, to translate itself into verse form. The somewhat indigestible result took me some weeks to recast into readable shape, but the substance is the same as flashed through my mind during my first few minutes after entering a certain doorway.

### HÔTEL DE LUXE, JERUSALEM

Here where they scourged You, blow on sickening blow,  
Here where Your blood spotted the Path of Pain. . . .

*A sleek little waiter to twiddle me in,  
Thro' the roundabout doors that keep out the fresh air,  
Carpets to tread upon, softer than Sin,  
And "Yes, sir—Your hat, Sir?"—"The bar, Sir, is there."*

*Stink of French perfume, and tunes from Kentucky,  
Bored Jewish band with a palm-tree beside—  
Spoils of the world for the few, for the lucky:  
Heart of the world that is breaking outside.*

Here where the nails held fast the festering flesh,  
While Death thro' the darkened hours creeps slow, too slow. . . .

*Herod from Egypt with corn and with cotton  
Held from the children till prices increase:  
Brigadier Gallio, pink as raw mutton,  
Ruling a nightmare and calling it Peace.*

*Young Pontius Pilate, with gleaming Sam Browne,  
Sipping pink gin as he passes the buck,  
"I've washed my hands of it. Turned the job down.  
'Tisn't my pigeon if things come unstuck."*

Oh, You who felt the blood, the nails, the blows,

Pardon us now, as once You pardoned Rome.

Forget the folly and the filth that grows

Around the feet of Empire. Keep in mind

Only the patient toil: the ache for home:

The sometimes just resolve, the sometimes kind:

The love for men we slay: the load of hate

Bitterest from those whom most we strive to please:

Blind faith in future good. Forget not these

And breathe o'er us, who have forgotten You,

Your ancient Peace—"They know not what they do."

## CHAPTER TWO

### CAIRO

"Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother:  
thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian; because thou wast a  
stranger in his land."

DEUT. xxiii. 7.

#### I. CHAIR-BORNE

THE office in the Castle of String, from which I had been sent to Jerusalem, consisted of three rooms in a requisitioned flat. In one sat the Colonel. In another typists typed, and cupboards held our files—files crammed with forbidden 'copy' which might make any writer's fingers itch, life-stories filled with good jokes and heart-breaking plots for a thousand short stories, spy-dramas and psychological novels which I must never write. In the third and smallest room, four of us sat and worked, two generally interviewing an outsider or dictating to a secretary, while a couple of telephones rang or chirruped with joyous insistence.

The senior member of our quartet was a burly farmer's son from Worcestershire. After selling soap in various continental capitals, and working extremely hard for two and a half years in our stuffy and most un-rural office, he still disseminated a faint atmosphere of barns and hayfields. He played Rugger, sometimes in the hot weather, and was reputed to run round Gezira Island, the residential Mayfair of Cairo, every morning before breakfast. He certainly generated a wonderful gusto for work, play and friendship, and his red face was a banner of cheerfulness.

The second was a young archæologist from Nottingham and Cambridge, who had specialized in the civilization of the Nabatæans and had spent some time before the war in Southern Palestine, using local Arab labour to dig up the remnants of their forgotten towns. Like all experts, he seemed irritatingly uninterested in the only part of his subject which the man in the street has ever heard of, Petra, the "Rose-red city half as old as Time". But his enormous general knowledge seemed to include anything that had ever happened to anybody in any century B.C. He also knew a lot about Islam, and taught me both how to find old mosques and houses in Cairo and how to enjoy them. His learning, which was at everyone's service

for reference or entertainment, did not make him in the least vague in practical matters. He had a precise, sharp and often witty tongue, and he could be ruthlessly efficient whenever there was office business to be quickly disposed of.\*

The third was the Administrative Officer, who was so busy (generally with a telephone held to each ear) that I could never discover what his outside interests were. If there ever was an opportunity to ask him, it was always cut short by the telephone ringing again. He would smile a wan smile, pick up the receiver and be lost to all outside enquiry.

The Colonel sat in the next room with a large safe, an even larger mahogany bureau, and, largest of all, an air-conditioning contraption which looked like an overgrown radio set and made the atmosphere smell vaguely of Piccadilly Tube Station. He was a professional soldier with a great love of good English. He could cover sheets of foolscap with some of the best and most workmanlike prose that I have ever seen in typescript. He had read widely in literature, particularly spiteful literature. His combined love for malice and good style naturally drew him to the eighteenth century, and he knew his Junius better than—as a thorough-going atheist—he knew his Bible. He could tell a good story, and I well remember his recounting to us one night what is surely the best repartee in the whole history of Wit. It was occasioned by Lord Sandwich looking long and quizzically at his political opponent, John Wilkes, who, being of a particularly hideous countenance, was not used to being stared at. Wilkes enquired the reason for his Lordship's attention.—“I was only wondering,” said Lord Sandwich, “whether you were more likely to die of the pox or upon the gallows.” “That will depend,” answered Wilkes, “on whether I embrace your Lordship's mistress or his principles.”

I would like to find room in my book for another remarkable person, who haunted the entrance to our office. He was an Egyptian, with legs so crumpled and twisted beneath him as to be useless, and he had no means of locomotion but a little wooden trolley or, more often, his bare hands. I am not going to spin a long and sentimental

\* Extract from 3 official letters:

A to B: ‘... and all stores have now been disposed of.’

B to A: ‘... but would point out that a preposition is a bad word to end a sentence with.’

A to B: ‘... and must make it clear that criticism of our prose style is an unwarrantable impertinence, up with which we will not put.’

yarn about the beggar at our gate, for nothing hurt him so much as an offer of money: he would only accept small packets of tea, or some such comfort difficult to come by in wartime. He lived on God knows what, in a basement room, through the windows of which he had contrived an ingenious form of entrance. He seemed to have no recreation beyond reading newspapers and chatting with loungers at the entrance. The remarkable thing about him is one that he shares with many companions in misfortune, particularly with the blind. I am not judging from the beaming smile with which he greeted us all, but from observation of him when he could not know he was being observed. And I can only say that he seemed and, I believe, was, consistently and actively happy.

I hope that some of my acquaintances in the Middle East are not too much surprised or too contemptuous at my devoting a whole paragraph to what they are pleased to call a 'wog'. It always seems to me a foolishly indiscriminate term to apply to many millions of our fellow-creatures, from the naked fuzzy-wuzzy of the Sudan to the fair-skinned, yellow-haired, over-educated bank clerk in a sophisticated, Europeanized town like Beirut. I have on my side the weight of authority and military discipline. I cannot help wishing that para. 3 of H.Q. 17 Area 17/8/5/A of 6 Mar. 44 could be extended in scope and more strictly enforced. It ran: "The word 'wog' will not be used in any circumstances when referring to civilians."

If the actual use of the word does no great harm, I think the spirit of contempt that is behind it does very great harm indeed. There are persons who have spent a few years speeding in motor-cars from a Cairo office to the Turf Club and so home to a Hampstead-like flat on Gezirah, who will unashamedly tell you, "I know the swine. I've lived among 'em. Lazy, dirty, dishonest! There's only one way to treat 'em. You'll soon find out!"

I can only speak from a two-year experience, some fairly close observation, and the assurance of those who have had longer contact. The people of Egypt are dirty by European standards, and only a fool would deny it. There are plenty of lazy ones among them, as among all people, and men who will not work without constant supervision. Others, and large numbers, work exceedingly hard for long hours, and will go on after those hours without hope of pay, in workmanlike desire to finish a job off properly. They are far more honest about money than many of the foreigners resident in their country. I am one of those forgetful idiots who seldom counts



change or even remembers what it should be. I have been more often called back in Cairo shops than in London ones, to be paid my due. Quite recently I put down a five-pound note and was airily walking off with one pound's change when the Egyptian shop-keeper summoned me back to pay me the other four. If that is not honesty, words have no meaning.

I am happy to have the support of one who has worked twenty years among the Egyptians to reinforce my own impression that no people can be more puzzled or resentful at the brutish discourtesy with which many Englishmen treat them. No people respond more loyally or quickly to courteous treatment. *Bakshish* means much to them, for one must remember that most of them are hideously poor. Courtesy sometimes means more.

My friend whom I have quoted worked half in Cairo, half among the villagers. He preferred the latter because of their astonishing generosity to their own poor. But he lent no support to the wholesale condemnation of the townspeople, nor joined the chorus of the half-baked British residents. It is indeed a chorus that rises with monotonous similarity from Poonah to Jamaica, beslaving with contempt every race which ministers to our comfort and profit. Its psychological roots are not very hard to analyse, and not very creditable.

My patient and experienced friend was not perhaps of the stuff from which Empire-builders are made. Conquest demands a certain ruthlessness, a certain blindness to such spiritual issues as might produce hesitation or fatal delay. But an Empire, once conquered, can be ruled ill or well. I believe that the British Empire has been gathered together with less cruelty and unscrupulousness than most. I believe it is administered with more selfless good-nature and more benefit to subject races than any which could replace it for a long time to come. But I do not think it can last for ever, and I do not think its power to spread justice, order and efficiency is being in any way prolonged by the chorus-makers.

Their words fall particularly harshly on my ears. I am, or try to be, a Christian, taking my marching orders from the Gospels and often finding in the Old Testament passages (such as that which heads this chapter) which provide surprisingly apt answers to wholly modern questions. I am also an officer in an army raised to combat and destroy a form of government whose ruling principle appears to be contempt for the governed.

## II. ALLIED

WE worked from 8 to 1, and from 5 to 8 in our crowded little office. I think the wiser of us used the afternoon, however hot, to play games, and the wisest of all bathed and dived. Others (and I was generally among the fools) read, dozed or slept. The three words are almost synonymous after lunch in an Egyptian summer. One sometimes woke refreshed, and ready for an evening's work, especially after a good cold shower. One sometimes woke feeling like Death and no cold water could effect a resurrection. We nominally had one day off a week, and actually took it about once a month. There was a foolish pride among us non-combatants which also excluded all leave, and thereby probably left us so stale as to impair our powers of helping the fighting troops by our work. But in the true words that Flecker puts into the mouth of the Baghdad watchman:

"Men are unwise, and curiously planned."\*

During business hours I often had occasion to go round the corner and consult a Frenchman. He had been born in Cairo and only knew France as a schoolboy and a soldier in the Four Years War. He still breathed the spirit of 1914 from his tubby but most lively body, and simply could not understand what had happened to his countrymen between 1918 and 1940. His manner of conveying contempt was superb; the gesture and intonation with which he described certain undesirable persons as "*Pire que Vichy!*" were in themselves an education in politics.

I shall not readily forget my first visit to his private home. He sent a car for me in the evening, and it bore me through unknown streets and mysterious bazaars where torches flared murkily. It plunged into deeper and darker slums. It stopped suddenly before the massive archway of a high-walled enclosure. Servants peered, and appeared. One almost expects them to bring out halberds, as the hinges groaned and the gates swung open. But before me, in the heart of this semi-industrialized town, stretched a moonlit avenue of trees such as one might perhaps find in the close of an

\* *Hassan*. Last Act. Last line but two. Most of the quotations in this book are from memory and most of them are probably slightly incorrect. But I think I have this one right.

English cathedral city. When the car swung past what should have been the residence of Dean and Chapter, and came at last to a halt, I could not help looking up as I was ushered out, in the hope of seeing the towers or spires. There was indeed a huge building towering above me, larger though less shapely than most cathedrals. It was the Cairo gasometer. My friend was head of the *Compagnie des Usines à Gaz* of the city, and he and his co-directors were housed as befitted their dignity.

Our contacts with other Allies, and particularly with Allied officers, were all too few. Cairo was full of men who had escaped to join us from France or Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Greece or Jugo-Slavia. Some of them no doubt behaved in an 'un-English' way at times, but we did little or nothing to help. It surely needed little imagination for us to put ourselves occasionally in the position of those who had lost home and country, and knew their wives and children to be either dead or at the mercy of a merciless enemy. We might even have tried to understand the grinding inferiority complex that defeat and exile must produce among the *émigrés* of every clime and century. We were frequently reminded of our duty in official orders and circulars, yet few of us, I fear, went out of our way to take such a simple step as the issue of an invitation to dinner. Some of us suffered from the Englishman's natural shyness towards foreigners, and it is never surprising that the foreigner mistakes it for disdain. Most of us never gave the matter a thought until too late, as when the avoidable crisis of the Greek mutiny forced it upon our attention.

There was occasionally an incident which might occasion disdain, though not necessarily all on one side. But neither side had social opportunity to discuss it with the other. Each retired to its own clubs and offices to gloat over the other's mistakes and intolerances, to pile molehills into mountains, swollen with exaggeration and self-satisfaction, till the failure of an Englishman to salute or of an Allied officer to shave before breakfast, was solemnly quoted as an international incident of the first importance. God knows there were enough real difficulties: alliance is an intricate art. But the neglect and malice which multiplied unnecessary quarrels must have provided Hitler with many a good laugh.

I always maintained that it would be easier for our Government to administer the raps on the knuckles that Allied Governments may sometimes have deserved (and a good rap is often the best guarantee of friendship) if there were firmly cordial relations between individual

officers of the two countries. I spoke recently with a Scottish officer who has spent three years on specific liaison work with all the various Allied armies. I told him that my time in the East had ratified my former belief that *the British people were the greatest in the world*, but that I wished it did not show quite so much ignorance and apathy about others. He looked up with a sudden flash in his eyes and said, "You've hit on the two words—ignorance and apathy. We don't know, and we don't want to know."

He was thinking of an incident I have already called avoidable: needless to say, it weighed greatly on his mind. He was thinking of the unnecessary weeks and months that have been added to the duration of the war by jealousies and misunderstandings. I had not his intimate knowledge or official experience: I only judge by what I see and hear around me. But I cannot help feeling a little bitter when I see men busying themselves, before this war is finished, in sowing the seeds of the next.

### III. CYPRIAN

My forty-first birthday saw me getting up unusually early and, after a short peep at Cairo's dawn-tinted citadel, making my hasty way to the aerodrome outside the city. I was soon being treated to an excellent lesson in plastic geography and history. I watched the little strip of market-garden along the Nile broaden out towards the green Delta. I watched the great plain of Sinai and Arabia Petræa narrow into the coastal strip of Sharon, then into the few hundred yards which Mount Carmel leaves between itself and the sea: then, after the broad wedge of flat land that once fed Acre, into the rocky, wave-beaten Ladder of Tyre. From there or thereabouts, the aeroplane turned north-westwards. We sighted the mountains of Cyprus rearing their heads above the sea, and were soon circling down towards Nikosia, in the rather arid-looking centre of the island. I got out well pleased with my birthday treat.

I was at first too busy to explore anything except a few parts of Nikosia itself, which hinders exploration by having more narrow streets and fewer wide ones than any city I know. I penetrated through the most baffling arabesque of by-ways in order to discover its fourteenth-century cathedral, not unlike a French one, if a trifle less ornate. It has long been a Muslim mosque, indeed since the Turk

wrested the island from Venice in the days when Shakespeare was a boy. It is a little saddening to see huge texts from the Koran hanging like notice-boards from Gothic angel-corbels, and an over-decorated Muslim pulpit pushed in edgeways for the Mu'allam to preach from, in an attempt to re-orientate the whole building south-eastwards towards Mecca. The effect (like that of most things Turkish) is hasty and nomadic. It looks as if some Junior Officer of Lala Mustafa's Army had rearranged things for a drum-head prayer-meeting on the Friday after the pillage, and no one had bothered, through three and three-quarter centuries, to improve on his *impromptu* placardings.

There are many interesting things to see in Nikosia, but perhaps the best is outside, or rather, around it—the carefully designed Venetian fortifications, which date from an age that had already grown wary about artillery but had not yet discovered the systematic ingenuities of Vauban. The ramparts today are crowned with gardens. The moat (with its nooks where gun-emplacements, cunningly sequestered, could enfilade the attacker and blow him scientifically into mincemeat) now provides a quiet spot where the men and women of Nikosia can watch their children play, or beget more of them behind a bush. They have to be careful about it, for if Cyprus is no longer sacred to Venus, it is certainly a terrible focus for the diseases that bear her name.

But the general atmosphere of the town and its outskirts is respectable to the point of Victorianism, at least during the long and sultry day. Large Tennysonian trees droop and murmur round a St. George Hotel that looks like an illustration to a novel by Trollope. The inevitable, most Victorian horse-cabs which roll, battered but dignified, through most cities of the Levant, have here few taxis with which to compete. I have read that the first English representative who came to take over the island in the name of Dizzy and Queen Victoria was a naval officer in a four-wheeler, followed by a second four-wheeler filled with sixpenny-bits which he was instructed to distribute as largesse to the inhabitants of Nikosia. The English Church which must have arisen soon after his arrival is an excellent specimen of what our grandfathers imagined to be Gothic, in the days when Ruskin was more than dictator of the Arts. I attended service there, and when I emerged from it after a most memorable chat with a friendly and understanding parson, I could hardly believe the eyes which told me I was in a field full of young camels.

The camels of Cyprus seemed to me to be of a smoother-coated and more elegant breed than those of the mainland countries, and to wear a slightly less disgruntled expression on their faces. They do a great deal of the farm work, and one meets dignified strings of them on the roads, looking a good deal sleeker than the rusty wartime motor cars which fuss past them from town to town.

North of Nikosia, and indeed close along the whole coast, runs a huge chain of solemn mountains which, long before Man arrived, were joined to the mountains of Syria. Between them and the sea, on their green northern slopes, lie the prettiest gardens and farms. I had occasion to cross them once, and to see that little gem of a harbour town which is called Kyrene or Kyrenia. But the experience fades into nothing compared with another sight which I was enabled to see on top of the ridge, by a half-day's holiday and the expenditure of much money on the hire of a car. I went with an expert on botany, who told me that a surprising number of flowers are found only in Cyprus, suggesting that it was cut off from Syria at some early stage of floral evolution. But it was not flowers I had come to see. It was something even more unique, and the memory of it will stay with me as long as life.

We turned to the left as the road approached the crest of the ridge. We passed some nondescript villas. We passed a hideous modern castellated tower, for which Malplacé (suggested as a name for the Duke of Marlborough's ill-situated London house, to match that of Blenheim Palace) would be a hopeless understatement. Then we came out into the green upland valley where Hilarion once dwelt as a hermit, and saw the wonder we had come to see.

When Saladin and his sons destroyed the Crusading Kingdom of Jerusalem, its dynasty—by this time Lusignans from Anjou—retreated to their twin Kingdom of Cyprus, and there ruled a society of barley-sugar feudalism, of heraldry, hawking and hunting, diversified by picturesque adultery and a few extremely savage murders. They built three castles on the mountain ridge, Kantara, Buffalmacone and St. Hilarion. The first two, magnificently perched, are now wind-swept ruins, with little more than their foundations left. Of the third there is enough and more than enough, still standing, to make it one of the glories of the earth.

I would not like to estimate what acreage—or even square-mileage—its walls shut in. I would not like to guess the height from its gatehouse to its topmost turret. The whole layout is so fantastically

complicated that I would certainly not like to try making any ground plan. Nor could any such plan on flat paper convey an idea of its shape or splendour. It climbs up and down crags and precipices in a way that baffles description. To step from the sublime to the ridiculous, one can only say that even the designers of the advertisements for toothpaste never pictured such a seemingly impossible conglomeration of architecture.

From the summit, one looks across to Turkey and the mountains of Asia Minor. Southward, the whole island seems to be within ken. A clear, fresh breeze blows round the crumbling battlements and through the intricately-fretted windows. One is indeed on top of the world.

It is no good asking what labour was needed to raise the whole complex pile, what garrison could man the vast perimeter with all its bastions and re-entrants, nor whence such huge numbers of men could be victualled by wagon or on camel-back. Some of its story can be gleaned from the medieval Greek of the Cypriot chroniclers. But on the spot, we are above historical speculation. We have wandered up into Cloud-Cuckooland, into the fairy domains where there are no weights and measures. And if you can linger a little time among the flowers that decorate every chink of the ancient masonry, if you can catch the tune that the wind sings among them, you will go down a wiser man or woman, and thereafter see real life with slightly different eyes.

If anything could avoid being an anti-climax after that climatic experience, Famagusta certainly does its best. So far as historical interest goes (which is not, alone, very far) it certainly succeeds. I had a good day to spend there, before taking ship back to Egypt. Of all the cities of the Levant it most tempted me to quote Shelley's hackneyed lines:

That Ages, Empires and Religions there  
Lie buried in the ravage they have wrought.

Some way northward lies the primeval Greek city from which they are still digging up potsherds. Immediately to the south is a very modern watering place with little gardens and villas. In between, old Famagusta is little more than a shell of antiquity enclosing some sparse but noisome slums whose inhabitants seem half asleep and wholly diseased. A scrofulous and disillusioned shoe-black lounges against the pillar to which the Turks strung up Bragadino

for torture. After a very long siege, they had promised him his life as the price of surrender. When he led out his famished and bedraggled little garrison Lala Mustafa, Selim the Sot's general, was so enraged to think that so few had so long delayed the largest and (by sixteenth-century standards) the most scientifically equipped army in the world, that he broke his word, summoned the local Jewish barber-surgeon, and had his opponent flayed alive, so that his skin could be stuffed with straw and sent to decorate the Grand Serail at Istanbul.

Bragadino died well, with never a groan for himself, but only reproaches for his tormentor's worse than sottish breach of faith. The walls he defended are still standing and still formidable. Without heavy artillery, a modern Army Corps would not quickly wrest them from a defending battalion cunningly ensconced in rock-hewn ditches and unscaleable emplacements. The vast sheer-sided moat would laugh at a tank attack, and dive-bombers would have difficulty in finding or shaking the deeply-buried garrison. Even Vauban, even Maginot, might have learned a trick or two from a visit to Famagusta.

On the seaward side, the fortifications link up with the castle, where a rather improbable Othello is said to have smothered a quite legendary Desdemona. It was here that I took tea with four officers of an Indian regiment and saw the strange piece of luggage that I had to take with me to Cairo. I emerged by an evil-smelling sea-postern on to a beach where Byzantine pottery positively crackled under my feet, and made my way across a heath to the house of Famagusta's hard-working archæologist. He was of Syrian origin, son to a doctor who bequeathed him a name that rings comically in Western ears, that of Mr. Magubgub.

I had heard of him before, and I wanted to talk to him about Famagusta. But I also had a personal question to put, having sought an answer at Nikosia in vain.

There is a tradition in my family that, in the days when Byron was giving his life for Greek liberty, an ancestor of ours was martyred by the Turks in Cyprus, being given the alternative of conversion to Islam or death, and choosing the latter. One can still see the little square in Nikosia round which the Turks thought it funny to drive their victims on all fours, with horses' bits in their mouths, before hanging them on the gallows. One can see the well down which the corpses were afterwards thrown. But I could get no list of their



names. And when I had put my ancestor's name to one learned Nikosian he had replied somewhat disconcertingly, "Let me see now, let me see—wasn't he one of the ones that recanted?"

Mr. Magubgub was not able to enlighten me on the spot, and the problem of my ancestor's martyrdom or cowardice remained unsolved. Thereby hangs another tale, which is also cherished in the family. We say that our ancestor was married to a lady of quite unusual charms who had to flee from the Turks, a widow with three daughters. Four dignitaries of the land which gave her refuge proposed to her in turn. With the first three she temporized, then suggested her eldest, middle and younger daughters as more eligible. Having successfully settled all three as married women, she accepted the fourth for herself and lived with him to a ripe old age. I cannot vouch for the historical accuracy of the story but it should certainly be on record. *Si non vero—ben trovato.*

I had to be on board before sundown, so it was still light when I detached myself reluctantly from Mr. Magubgub's books and conversation, recrossed the heath, and ducked under the little sea-gate again to find my way to the dockside and to my cabin. As I strolled out on deck, I could forget about the ages, empires and religions. The mountain range on which stands St. Hilarion was fading into violet gloom. Soon the black mass of Famagusta's castle was indistinguishable, and my last impression of Cyprus was of arc-lamps along a wholly modern quay. It has a present—and a future—as well as a past. I have said nothing of its modern problems, but they are intricate and acute enough. We have found excuses for forgetting them in England, even for forgetting that our Empire contains this among its many islands of beauty and interest. But it is inhabited by men and women, and it will not be wise or just for us to forget them too long.

#### IV. PYRAMIDAL

I HAD spent some three weeks in Cyprus, and returned to Cairo in early May, to resume an office routine that was not interrupted again until July, the famous July of El Alamein which interrupted so many activities in Cairo.

I must not imitate my friend the Nabatean archæologist by writing about *Hamlet* while ignoring what the man in the street regards as

the Prince of Denmark. I visited the Great Pyramid more than once. I even climbed to the top, taking  $9\frac{1}{2}$  minutes for the ascent. And I am going to say a word or two about it.

It might be best to speak first of its pattern and archetype, the little step-pyramid of Saqqara. It was probably built only a short time before; and it shows how rapidly the wealth and power of the Pharaohs increased, and, with them, their grandiose ambitions for entombment. Saqqara, being twenty miles from Cairo, has kept a far more primitive, edge-of-the-desert atmosphere than the Great Pyramid, and is far less spoilt by Tourism. It has also a great number of treasures in the way of wall paintings and alabaster pottery. But my chief memory is of our ghostly climb through the narrow galleries inside the step-pyramid, before we emerged into its central chamber, and our white-robed attendants held up their flaring lanterns to illumine a five-thousand-year-old ceiling. It is supposed to be in danger of falling, and the general public is not admitted to the heart of the pyramid. But I have long ago discovered that some of the greatest pleasures and most interesting experiences in life are to be had by penetrating into places where the general public is not admitted.

Near-by is Memphis, once the capital of a huge empire, now a small village shaded by green palm-trees, with one alabaster Sphinx, one large recumbent Rameses, and another colossal one, roofed over with corrugated iron.

I was fortunate in my first visit to the great Pyramids, which can be reached from Cairo by a rather entertaining tram-ride to Mena. I arrived at sunset, when the importunate guides, the donkey-drivers and scarab-sellers were abandoning their hopes of further victims and calling it a day. I passed them on the steep road that runs down to the Hôtel de Luxe which caters for Mena's wealthiest visitors, and the police station where the poorer ones were taught their proper place. I climbed up alone, with the huge double triangle silhouetted above me.

Solitude, and especially solitude by twilight, can make the most hackneyed monument impressive. It is no good arguing about the pointlessness of this vast product of human labour, nor jeering at the motives which caused it to be raised. I have read of the meeting of a town council in some medieval French city, where the local grocers and pork butchers passed the superb resolution, "Let us build such a cathedral that after-ages will think us mad to have

attempted it",—I have no doubt that the result was a work of more artistry than the unshapely lump of the Pyramids. But there is something that warms the heart about any man or set of men seeking such a reputation from posterity. The product of Pharaoh's madness has now lasted for close on 5000 years, and there seems no reason why it should not last another 10,000. If during all those centuries it will have excited human wonder and awe as it did in my own insignificant mind, I cannot think that the colossal labour of its building was a waste. If it is vulgar to be impressed by mere age and mere size, with no architectural merit and a singular absence of grace, then I must confess to being vulgar. But I wager that those who call me so have not themselves visited the Great Pyramid of Cheops alone and by twilight.

Its twin, which stands just behind it on slightly higher ground, looks bigger from a distance. It needs a close view to reassure one that Cheops built a little more masonry than Chefrin. People occasionally kill themselves in attempts to get to the top of the latter monument, for its upper slopes are still encrusted with the smooth layers of polished stone which once covered the step-like blocks of the whole. But a friend of mine tells me it is easily and safely climbed if one takes off one's shoes and puts a little resin on the bare feet.

There is no difficulty about getting to the top of Cheops' tomb, and no very great excitement. The view from the top by daylight is very often obscured by heat haze. I found the whole business unexciting. It is more interesting to read about it in Baedeker, who invests it in all the glamour of his unique style.

The ascent of the Pyramid, though fatiguing, is perfectly safe. The traveller selects one or two of the Bedouin (p. 133). With one holding each hand, and the third pushing behind, he begins the ascent of the steps, usually at the N.E. corner, which are about 3 ft. high. The strong and active attendants assist the traveller to mount by pushing, pulling and supporting him, and will scarcely allow him a moment's rest until the top is reached. As, however, the unwonted exertion is fatiguing, the traveller should insist on resting so often as he feels inclined. All requests for *baksheesh* should be refused, and it is as well to keep an eye on one's pockets. The ascent may be made in 10-15 minutes, but, in hot weather especially, the traveller is recommended to take nearly double that time in order to avoid the discomfort of arriving breathless at the summit.

I am afraid Baedeker would not have approved of my own undignified and unassisted scramble, lacking all the panoply of

Victorian travel. He would, in a sense, have been right. We have lost much fun by refusing to take ourselves and our excursions as seriously as did our grandfathers.

The finer architecture and more graceful artistic products of the Pharaonic period are either at Karnak or in the Cairo Museum, which was firmly locked for fear of air raids before I reached Egypt, and has remained firmly locked ever since.

I used to wonder why the modern Egyptians seem to take so little interest in the primitive history of their country, except in so far as it brings tourists into their towns and money into their pockets. Occasionally a twentieth century building, such as Zaghlul's mausoleum, will make a half-hearted attempt to borrow the ancient dignity. Occasionally a *motif* from the Tombs of the Kings decorates some piece of modern craftsmanship which is not merely intended for cheap sale in Solyman Pasha Street. But for the most part the first 4000 years of Egyptian art and history mean nothing to the modern Egyptian, though facial types, compared with those depicted in ancient manuscripts, suggest that the race has changed little, whatever armies may have swept over the country. The answer is, I think, that in the East, race means little and religion everything. The modern Egyptian is not uninterested in art and history: but he keeps all his interest for mosques and Mohammedan textiles or pottery. To him, the history of his country hardly begins before the civilization of the Nile valley fell a prey to Arabian armies and Islamic preaching, and became largely indistinguishable from the civilizations of Morocco or Delhi.

I was cut off from any real appreciation of that civilization partly by a natural distaste for it, partly by the fact that I could not master the language. I had made fair progress, especially with the script, on the long voyage out from England: I had ample leisure, and one good teacher, who realized that to bewilder a pupil with his own knowledge of the intricacies and variations of a language is not the best way to teach him its elements. But once arrived in Cairo, I did not take sufficient trouble to make myself leisure or find myself another teacher. It is a difficult thing to do, unless necessity arises, and there was no necessity. People have lived in Cairo for years without being able to order themselves a meal or direct a taxi-driver in Arabic. I blame myself, but not greatly, for going with the tide, and forgetting most of what I had learned on board ship.

The months slipped by, the heat came, and overwhelmed me for

a week or so, until I grew accustomed to it and became more active than I ever am during an English winter. And then it was July 1942, and it suddenly became apparent that Egypt, successfully overrun from the East by the countless conquerors she had endured, was now being overrun from the West, and that at any moment Solyman Pasha Street might hear the roar of Rommel's tanks.

It is difficult to convey the rather heady atmosphere of those few days, when the Bureaucrats in battledress (or rather tropical shorts) began rummaging in trunks or *pension* cupboards for their half-forgotten revolvers, and the British Consulate was besieged with civilians demanding visas for Palestine, transit visas to Syria, visas that would get them anywhere East of Suez. There was not much bureaucratic work to do, for the bulk of our files and papers were being sent off to a safer country, whence (unfortunately) they soon returned. Other offices were wiser, and burned large quantities, greatly lightening the load of paper that was always threatening to swamp G.H.Q. My French friend, passing the Embassy gardens, smiled to see half-charred documents playing hide-and-seek in the wind, and offered his gasworks furnace as a safer crematorium. But the excitement soon passed, Rommel was soon in retreat again. Our files and records reappeared, and we buckled down again to our pen-scratchings and telephone calls. Only the Egyptian government took a malicious pleasure in refusing return visas to many of the civilians who had run away.

It was not long after this interlude that I was posted away to Syria—or rather the Lebanon—and had to say my good-byes in Cairo. Though I had hated many things about the life there, and often been most unhappy, I could not leave it without many regrets.

I certainly did not mind leaving the luxury, the flesh-pots of an Egypt that had not heard of rationing. But I did mind leaving my job which had recently become unusually interesting. I certainly minded leaving some of my friends.

There was one of these of whom I have not yet spoken, because our good bye was perhaps the most interesting thing about our friendship, and is going to make the tailpiece to this chapter. We had not met very often, but we had found much in common, and had enjoyed one good, though rainy, walk on the Muqqatam hills, and some fine talks and laughter over the dinner-table. We had talked of all things under the sun, of Russian novels, French poetry, Japanese prints, and of all that picturesque civilization

of which the memory has been blotted by Chung King and Pearl Harbour.

I was preparing to leave Cairo. She (for my friend was a girl) was about to be married. I do not think that she or her husband will object to my printing here the poems I wrote for her on my departure.

## SAYONARA

This is "Good-bye", and "Thank You". No more meeting  
At cheap Greek cafés. And, before I go,  
From Old Japan this courtliest farewell greeting.  
*Sa-y-on-ara.* "Since it must be so."

"Thank you for what?" For things you hardly noticed,  
Or, if you did, forgot within the hour;  
For of our faults we make the proudest protest,  
But never guess the secret of our power.

Thanks for a turn of head, a hand that hovered  
Till perfect gesture matched the perfect word,  
An eye that twinkled most when storm-clouds gathered,  
And saw the painful less than the absurd.

Thanks for your laughter, for that 'sudden glory'  
At jokes that no one else could understand:  
For beauty shared, in flower or sky or story,  
Clear to the lonely, clearer hand in hand.

And for one starlit hour beside the river,  
When you sat silent and I babbled on,  
Searching my trash for pearls, a faltering diver  
In that great sea which sleeps in everyone,

That deep, dark lake of unimagined stillness,  
Brooding for ever in its secret place,  
Beneath the fret and jar, Time's maddening mill-race,  
That stirs no ripple on its timeless face.

If, by your grace, we clambered down the stairway  
Lapped by those quiet waters of the soul,  
Lightlier we've walked and talked, thro' foul and fair way  
(You don't mind rain) to keep our friendship whole.

And now it's finished. If we meet hereafter,  
Please bring your husband, and look very plain  
(If you can manage that); and quiet that laughter.  
It might wake certain memories again.

So let me end my verse as I began it,  
While you give him what all too well I know  
Cannot be mine on this poor muddled planet.  
*Sayonara.* Since it must be so.

## CHAPTER THREE

# SYRO

"Beyond the village which men still call Tyre,"  
J. B. FLECKER, *The Old Ships*.

### I. PIANO

THE railway which leads from Cairo to Palestine, out of Africa into Asia, was completed soon after the last war. But it stopped short at Haifa, Palestine's northernmost large town. Beyond lay the twin states of Syria and the Lebanon, under French mandate: and all sensible schemes for continuing the railway were naturally strangled by a network of international misunderstandings and Red Tape. It was not until 1943, when Australian and South African engineers set coloured troops to work all along the rockbound coast, that the line was prolonged from Haifa to Beirut and Tripoli. It was only 1942 when I was posted from Cairo to the Lebanon. After managing to step off for a day at my beloved Jerusalem, see a little of parched Galilee, and swear a great oath to come back and see more, I had to hitch-hike up the coasts of those whom the Gospel call 'Syro-Phœnician', past Tyre and Sidon to Beirut.

At Beirut one is not so much in Asia as in Europe. Everybody speaks French: the majority are much fairer-skinned than Italians, and there is a very high proportion of golden and red hair. The Christian churches are far more prominent and have larger congregations than the mosques. The architecture resembles that of Provence or Italy, and the houses, instead of looking, as in Egypt, like piles of tousled hat-boxes, are crowned with steep-pitched, red-tiled roofs.

They are needed: when it rains in Beirut, it rains. The kind of torrential downpour which makes one say in England "Too violent to last", can go on in Beirut for three or four hours and repeat itself three or four times in the day. The waterspouts bounce and splinter on the red tiles and overflow the ample gutters and pipes. If there is some provision to get rid of rain, there is none against cold—hardly one sensible fireplace in the whole town. For three severe



months of winter the population cowers over charcoal braziers and oil stoves. Winter comes with its universal regularity, once a year. But it always seems to take the Beyroutis by surprise.

There are warier and hardier folk, mostly Christian and largely fair-haired, in the villages that hang above Beirut on the magnificent cliffs of Mount Lebanon. They are deeply buried in snow from December to March. But it is not much good being wary when one is grindingly poor, when timber is so scarce that the rich men of the cities can generally manage to corner three-quarters of the supply, and coal is a distant dream. Things are much the same throughout the Syrian plains: every morsel of camel and cow dung is carefully collected throughout the year and dried for winter fuel, and the economist is presented with the anomaly of a country that has been rich in both cattle and arable farming for 3000 years, with a soil that never gets a pennyworth of manure.

Things may have been different in the old days, when the upper slopes of Lebanon were clothed in the thousands of majestic cedars (non-tropical trees, which will only grow here at high altitudes) and the foothills with far-stretching pine-forest. Beirut still has its *Forêt des Pins* on the outskirts, famous since Roman and Crusading times; but, for the most part, too many goats have been nibbling off the shoots of young trees, too many centuries have passed under the callous and improvident rule of the Turk. There are two or three small groups of cedars left, one, the highest in situation, of about 300 trees. Elsewhere there are only olive groves—the most extensive in the world after those of Spain and California—and some hopeful young pine plantations that the French have been nursing and protecting from the goats, in the last 20 years.

The town of Beirut is a rather ramshackle affair, with all its central streets and buildings well away from the centre. In its long history (its importance dates back to later Roman times) it has more than once been destroyed by earthquake. It has grown up again on no particular pattern, and indeed its hilly, steep-sloped site would make any planning difficult. It has few ancient buildings, and fewer beautiful ones. Its chief attraction is its many gardens, pleasingly untidy after the gravel and geranium plots with which the rich men of Cairo surround their palaces: they make an almost romantic setting for the gimcrack little houses with their vine-clad verandas and twisting outside stairways.

As in every large city of the world, the conditions of the poor are

appalling. The worst quarter is the patch of land on which Armenian refugees from Anatolia settled down in wooden huts 20 years ago. Most of them are still in wooden huts, all traces of the rusticity of their first encampment has turned to sordid filth, and the whole place stinks to Heaven. It is not unnatural that the communist party in Beirut is largely recruited from the Armenians.

The poor man of Beirut and the Lebanon keeps himself cleaner than the Egyptian, and he can get a far better education. But I found him in many ways less attractive. He does not keep that childlike outlook which makes it amusing to watch the Cairenes milling with each other on the pavement or sends them into fits of laughter about nothing in particular. His whole horizon is not irradiated, as the Egyptian's, by the sudden acquisition of a half-piastre or the sight of a fat policeman coming to grief on a banana skin. He accepts such alleviations of monotony with a more dour grace, and never quite loses his suspicions about life in general. He has something to suspect, for the rich men of the Lebanon, Muslim, Druse or Christian, show a more than Oriental indifference to the lot of the poor.

But even the dour have their virtues, and I could not help being impressed by one encounter I made at nightfall in a steep and narrow lane in Beirut. I met there a young lad who was rummaging in the gutter and crying his heart out as he did so. Another Lebanese was passing, a soldier in Fighting French uniform. With him as interpreter, I got the boy's story. He said he had that morning launched out into life, to earn a living as a street porter: he hoped, no doubt, to grow into one of those prodigies of strength who make furniture-removers unnecessary in Beirut and, by slinging a webbing strap over the forehead, can carry a huge wardrobe on their backs or even, it is whispered, a cottage piano. In the first day of his career he had earned exactly one pound (Syrian), the equivalent of about half a crown. Now he had dropped the precious oblong of paper into the gutter and the rain had swirled it away in the dark.

I do not think, when I believed this story, that I was being one of a series of suckers from whom he was extracting a pound (Syrian) apiece. I think he was telling me the truth, and my soldierly dragoman agreed with me. The interesting thing was that when I had dived into my pocket and made good his loss, he accepted my gift without enthusiasm and departed for home still weeping. It was not *his* pound, not the actual money he had earned by his own labours

on the first day of his full manhood. *That* had vanished down a gutter, and no charity could replace its loss.

I walked on a little way with the soldier. His race and uniform reminded me of one more thing that must be remembered whatever hard words one may have to say of the Lebanese. In the famous battle on the Western Desert near Bir Hakeim, the Free French forces, isolated from their allies, put up a most unexpected and finally successful resistance to all German onslaughts, though hopelessly overpowered in numbers and fantastically inferior in arms and equipment. Those who best know the details say that there was little exaggeration in the advertised story. Some of the men, all the officers and particularly the leader who sent back the traditional answer to Rommel's demand for a surrender, were Frenchmen bred and born. But a very considerable proportion of the common soldiers, some of whom I afterwards saw in Beirut hospitals, were recruited in Syria and the Lebanon.\*

## II. CLASSICAL

My C.O. at Beirut had no air-conditioning machine in his office. He was a baronet from Southern Ireland, whose fiercely beetling eyebrows completely failed to disguise the fact that he was most kindly disposed to the whole world—that is, to the whole world except Northern Ireland. He took great delight in pointing out, with what accuracy I do not know, that neutral Eire had sent a noticeably higher proportion of her population into the British Army during this war than nominally belligerent Ulster. He was connected, by blood or marriage, with that delightful pair of writers whom all good men know under the pseudonyms of Somerville and Ross. His tales of his own boyhood in County Kerry before the Four Years War had the same atmosphere and *patina* as theirs. They

\* The French commander at Bir Hakeim was General Koenig, of Alsatian origin. His reply to Rommel has been traditional in the French army at least since Waterloo.

From General-Oberst Rommel on 3 June '42 (eight days before the end of the battle):—

"Your future resistance can only cause unnecessary bloodshed and draw on you the same fate as that of the two English brigades who were annihilated at Got Saleb the day before yesterday. We will call off the battle if you hoist a white flag and come to us without arms."

From General Koenig to General-Oberst Rommel: "Merde!"

Another less laconic version of this reply is also given:

"Je suis Alsacien et je ne comprends pas l'allemand."

were tales of a lost world, which maybe deserves more regret than the modern age sees fit to accord it.

In the last war, after four years in the Artillery in France, he was posted to Turkey, at the time when Kemal Pasha was pulling that country out of the abasement into which it had been thrown by two centuries of sloth and maladministration.

I have hinted that I myself have hereditary reasons for hostility to the Turks, but I can easily understand how British officers like my C.O. find many things in them to like and even admire. They breed a class of men that have one or two of the virtues of the English gentleman, particularly the most un-Oriental virtue of not having an eye palpably and permanently cocked on the main chance. Their attitude to women was no more repulsive than that of most Eastern races, and since the days of Kemal Pasha, has been rather less so. Except for a few over-dignified aristocrats, most of them are very fond of a good joke, and their literature is full of little else. They are certainly good company individually, even though their nation seems now to be settling back into some of the Oriental corruption and inefficiency from which Kemal strove to rescue it.

Meanwhile one can think of them as good fellows so long as one forgets the cruelties and treacheries of their ancestors. Unfortunately one also has to forget their modern financial tyranny (backed by labour camps) which has replaced the old policy of plundering their Christian subjects, and the utter callousness they show towards conscripts and workpeople of their own race.

If I could not altogether share my C.O.'s partiality for the Turks, I could always listen with pleasure to his tales of old Ireland: and there was another vanished world in which I could occasionally wander with him, though he was far more at home in it than I, having kept up a more diligent interest in its guide-books. He had a sound knowledge of the Classics, and a great love for them. One of the first jobs he gave me in Beirut was the translation of some lines and epigrams from Greek and Latin poets. The bulk of them took me rather over a year, and the fruits of my labours appear later in this book. But I was rather pleased with myself when he shot at me

*"Non cauponantes bellum, sed belligerantes"*

and I was able to shoot back after only a few minutes' thought:

*"We do not barter war, with you. We fight."*

He and I spent a little of the Government's time, and much of our own, exchanging enthusiasms for poets long dead and buried: perhaps some of the precision of language and thought which we had learned from them at school improved our official letters and reports, speeding up His Majesty's business, when there was so much verbiage and ambiguity to retard it. We had certainly kept the *entrée* to a most refreshing mental recreation, even better than cross-word puzzles and detective novels. We shared an admiration of such English writers as were most steeped in the glories and whimsicalities of Greece and Rome. He joined me in regretting that one of our best minor poets, a great classical scholar, had written so few of his sometimes gem-like verses. I would have liked to have put into my C.O.'s mouth, with one word altered, those last lines addressed to the poet Comatas—imprisoned (as is the lot of poets) by a tyrant, and then shut up to starve in a cedarwood chest where he was only kept alive by the bees which came in through the air-hole and brought him the plunder of the blossoms.

. . . Or in thy cedarn prison, thou waitest for the bee.  
 Ah, leave that simple honey and take thy food from me.  
 My Sun is stooping westward. Entranced dreamer, haste.  
 There's fruitage in my garden that I would have thee taste.  
 Now lift the lid a little. Now, Dorian shepherd, speak.  
 Two minds shall flow together, the *Irish* and the Greek.\*

### III. BASTINADO

OUR official work at Beirut was largely on police matters and occasionally reminded me of the days of my childhood, when I was taken—generally to see some procession—to my father's room in the Criminal Department of the Home Office. But it involved a double liaison with French and Lebanese authorities, which sometimes proved even more complicated than it sounds.

It taught me many lessons I had not yet learned, even in Cairo. It taught me (as indeed the whole war has tended to do) rather more respect for the Victorian interest in melodrama than I had held before.

\*The poet is William Johnson Cory. His only famous poem is the lovely eight lines called *Heracleitus*. Almost more interesting, to my mind, is *The Two Captains*, a seemingly flippant and yet heart-searching poem on chivalry, given in the form of a description of an eighteenth-century naval battle.

It seemed unreal in the well-cushioned days of peace, when the more sinister aspects of life could be kept from the prosperous, or only reach them through the filter of the newspapers. Beirut gave me a ringside seat, and even a little participation, in a local *cause célèbre* the minor details of which were fascinating but unimportant; the major psychological framework was worth much pondering.

There are no impeccable heroes and heroines in the world such as our grandfathers liked to see on the stage. But I am fully persuaded that there are villains. Certain men and women, early or late in life, may take a wrong turning which forces them to go on taking wrong turnings and compels them to blacker and blacker crime, until they are caught and punished. Unfortunately the majority are not caught, or not caught until they have done a marvellous amount of mischief in the world, and each successful eluding of justice necessarily lures them on to another iniquity. Sometimes they may suddenly be tripped, turned back and converted by the Grace of God. But the Grace of God is a mysterious factor, on the workings of which Society in general, and a police force in particular, cannot be expected to rely. We must have bolts, shackles and the gallows, even if we sometimes use them by error on the innocent. My experiences at Beirut produced in me a complete revulsion against all my former ideas of Punishment and Pardon. I saw the terrible necessity of the former, and its strange power to heal. I saw the frequent futility of the latter, especially when it springs from an easy-going weakness and a generalized desire to be thought (and think oneself) kind. I began to understand what I had once thought I should never understand—how a rogue's escape from his penalty may be considered as grave a miscarriage of justice as an innocent man's condemnation, and may, in the end, cause more human suffering. I began to understand better something that I had first descried during my time in a Commando. I began to know what Shakespeare meant when he wrote—

“Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill.”

Another discovery, and one involving a considerable shock, was concerned with the methods which the police must use (and will always be tempted to misuse) if they are to protect the innocent from fraud and slaughter. I am not now speaking of the Turks, nor of the half-dozen Oriental nations with whose governments we were in communication from Beirut. I am thinking of representatives of

several Western nations, including our own, who had done police-work in peace time and brought with them a certain experience, and certain methods founded upon that experience, which are not generally discussed in public. It is extremely doubtful if society could survive without the occasional, if infrequent, use of such methods. And one of them is Torture.

Having used a word with somewhat melodramatic associations, I would like to be calm and scientific in defining what I mean by it. I think it should cover a wide field, but I do not think that that field should include the psychological processes—the keeping of men in unnecessary suspense, anxiety or terror—which may or may not be more painful and exhausting than physical pain. I mean something physical, beginning with knocking a handcuffed man about the face, flogging him with a cat-o'-nine-tails (as we do in England), or using mechanical devices to produce pain. I call this torture, and I repeat that I am doubtful whether any society could survive without its occasional use. I am pretty sure that no society (whatever laws it may pass) has yet succeeded in doing entirely without it.

It is important to remember for what purposes it has been, and is, used. It has been used—and made into a public spectacle—purely as a deterrent. It has been used, and successfully used, to change men's opinions and loyalties. The essence of a man is his will. But you can put such outward pressure upon him (if you are wicked enough to use these methods) as will force most men to abandon their beliefs and allegiances in order to adopt others. It is known that in fact such 'conversions' can be genuine and lasting, whatever the theorists may say. Persecution often succeeds. Torture is sometimes applied merely to satisfy the sadistic instincts of the torturer: and perhaps an element of this is bound to creep in to any use of it, for whatever purpose. But far the most important and extensive use of it, in every place and century, is for the obtaining of information.

As an historian I am always a little irritated by the glib phrase 'medieval torture'. It ignores, to begin with, the fact that the people of the Middle Ages invented few new tortures and, on the whole, practised less cruel and far less ingenious ones than the Romans before them or the Renaissance centuries after. The phrase is also used to imply that sadism, or, at least, deterrence, were the only motives. But in all ages the prevailing aim of the whole business is to make unwilling prisoners speak.

The obvious objection, that under torture they will not speak the truth, is unfortunately not borne out by experience. Human nature is a complex affair, and seldom logical in its reactions. Roman law refused to accept any evidence from slaves *unless* it was given under torture. The American Police would long ago have given up using the Third Degree—and what lies beyond the Third Degree—if it only resulted in constables being sent on wild-goose chases in the wrong direction. The Spanish Inquisition had careful records of its own experiments, stretching over several centuries. It may surprise the reader to hear that its use of torture was far more carefully restricted than that of contemporary civil governments. It was also more scientific, and achieved scientific results. Its aim was seldom 'conversion', never the pleasure of watching victims squirm. Its aim was similar to that of a modern police-force which has to deal with the spread of social or political disaffection; it was determined to discover where heretics had learned their opinions, where they had met, and who were their organizers and ringleaders. And for the most part, it seems to have succeeded.

There must always be failures. Guy Fawkes was tortured very long and very horribly, in ways that would not have been permitted in the Holy Office. Needless to say, this was not done in order to punish him for having tried to blow up the King in Parliament, but in order to make him disclose who had planned and financed the scheme, who had been his fellow-conspirators (highly placed, highly dangerous, and still at large) and how far the representations of a foreign (practically an enemy) power had had a hand in fostering the plot. He was a man of inhuman courage. He is said to have died at last without revealing a single name.

Many, perhaps most, civilized people, who have had no experience of police work, would probably deny hotly that the use of torture could ever be justified. If I agreed with them it would be solely on the ground that its use is bound to lead to misuse. And I would be hard put to it to give good arguments on, say, the eve of a big military offensive (when thousands of men must inevitably be consigned next day to unthinkable physical agonies) if the beating-up of an enemy spy might make him disgorge facts ensuring that the sufferings of our own soldiers should not be in vain.

I had no personal experience of any case in which it was applied to a spy. Most of them are such stupid or cowardly degenerates that one can get all the information one wants from them without



applying any physical pressure whatever. But I know of at least one case where the deliberate though restricted infliction of acute agony on individuals saved a whole society from much widespread suffering. So long as there is war in the world, even the war against crime or drugs or sedition, so long will men of all countries use a certain minimum of torture and if they do not misuse it, be justified in so doing.

Strenuous denials will probably reach me, as author of this chapter. I shall know just what they are worth. I shall also be accused, more honestly, of letting the cat out of the bag and destroying the comforting illusions of prosperous folk. I think such illusions are best destroyed. I think they create a most unreal and unhealthy atmosphere among people who deserve to hear the truth. I cannot see why this particular cat should be so hypocritically concealed in its soft velvet reticule.

#### IV. OCTOGENARIAN

If oddities come my way, so, apparently, do persons with historic tales to tell. There was an old gentleman who used occasionally to walk into our offices at Beirut, and more particularly into my room, to have a gossip and a cup of coffee. He had been born in the Lebanon some eighty years ago and had gone south to become an interpreter in the British Army. He could give an excellent eyewitness picture of the battle of Omdurman, and bring it home to one very vividly, imitating the sweeping gesture with which Kitchener, at the crisis of the fighting, rode forward and motioned to the whole line to advance. My old friend, Stephen Bey, had also been present when our forces so nearly came to blows with a French contingent at Fashoda, and had taken part in the negotiations upon which hung the whole future of our world. He had served his last campaign with Allenby in Palestine, with the regular army rather than with the Arabs and Colonel Lawrence, whom he had known but slightly. He had then retired to a large village in the folds of Mount Lebanon, and only paid Beirut an occasional visit.

He was very hale and active for all his age, and never seemed anything but cheerful—far more cheerful than I was in those days. Some of his political opinions were extremely interesting, though naturally all were deeply tinted with the colours of the Union Jack.

He had a rocklike faith in the British Empire, which had not only rid his own country of the Turks, but had also, he felt sure, conferred incalculable benefits on Egypt, Palestine, Iraq and the whole Near East. By his reckoning, and it was an odd one, we had only made one serious mistake in policy: we had been mad to oppose in any way the Italian conquest of Abyssinia.

About the time when he first walked into our office, I had gone to live under the roof of another octogenarian, a lady to whom I owe gratitude for much kindness, as well as the respect we all owe for a long life well and bravely lived. Her father, a Scottish engineer called Somerville, had come out to manage a silk factory in 1848. His fourth daughter, Jeannette, was born in Beirut in 1860, and apart from her schooldays in Glasgow, a trip to America just before this war and an aeroplane voyage to Palestine, at the age of 81, had passed her whole life in her birthplace or in the mountain villages which lie above it. For a short time in her girlhood she had been a pupil of the Prussian convent school in Beirut and had pleasant memories of the kindness and efficiency of the nuns. She remembered herself and her school-fellows being put into clean pinafores and new sashes to welcome the 'Kaiser'. I cannot trace this potentate. The dates will not fit in with the widely-advertised Eastern tour of the late and unlamented Wilhelm II: I know of no suitable forerunner of his since the Second Reich was founded on the ruins of France in 1871. Perhaps Time had made some slip with Miss Somerville and allowed her to put on a clean pinafore for the arrival, on Crusade, of some Hapsburg or Hohenstaufen from the Holy Roman Empire.

She could remember Beirut when only one road led out of it, up which the *diligence* crawled to Damascus, when one had to ride a horse along the sands to Tripoli, or southward to Acre, and was wiser to take a mule in any other direction. She must have been well on in years when the Four Years War broke out and left her, an enemy alien, with an invalid sister to nurse, in a most maltreated province of the Turkish Empire. She escaped maltreatment herself, though it is a puzzle to me where she got the money to live on, especially after the Americans joined in. She spent most of the four years in the mountains, and remembered vividly the day when she came down to see Allenby's men march into Beirut, famished and exhausted, with (luckily) a Scottish regiment at their head.

There was one matter on which she—and everyone else—was

unable to enlighten me. Before the last war, at the time when the Italians were fighting Turkey and dropped a shell or two into Beirut from their battleships, there was a young man working at the British Consulate there who later achieved some fame as James Elroy Flecker. He is best known as the author of *Hassan* and of a dozen or so very beautiful lyrics: one of them takes its title, *Brumana*, from a village that overhangs Beirut and entices its inhabitants up, at week-ends, by the offer of coolness and fresh air. Flecker needed the fresh air more than most: he was soon to die of consumption in a Swiss sanatorium.

He belongs to a small and not highly distinguished line of English writers who have found their themes and their inspiration in the Near East—Burton, Doughty, Fitzgerald and that queer fish, Marmaduke Pickthall. To my mind, he rivals Fitzgerald as a poet, especially in *The Golden Road to Samarkand*, though he is perhaps too taken with the picturesque superficialities to make a good interpreter of the East.

I have little doubt that, had he lived longer, he would have made a superlative dramatist. The first two Acts of *Hassan* are excellent and original comedy, skilfully dovetailed into a novel and interesting background. It is a pity that he suddenly gave it up—and forgot all about his fine creation, the character of Hassan himself—in order to plunge into the monotonous and frankly sadistic tragedy about Pervaneh and Rafi which occupies most of the rest of the play. But such faults are those of inexperience, and are easily corrected—if Time and Death allow.

I was naturally interested in the man himself and eager to pick up facts or traditions about him and his few years in Beirut. I had no success. Apart from a few of the missionaries, the English colony at Beirut contained no one who dated back so far. The British Consulate had moved since his time, and contained nothing very interesting in its records. Miss Somerville, who had gone there on business throughout her life, could not remember that she had ever had to deal with any young man of the name of Flecker.

My fellow-lodger at her house in *Rue Jeanne d'Arc* was also of a very respectable age. He had witnessed the incident which had caused the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana harbour. Being by profession a shipping expert on the staff of Lloyd's, his opinion on the subject was of some weight. He had recently retired to Cyprus, to the lovely

little port of Kyrenia, but had been turned out of his home when civilians were evacuated after the fall of Crete.

We talked a good deal of history, ancient and modern, round Miss Somerville's table, where Arabic dishes were diversified by Scottish-Victorian variations. She was always glad to talk about the Crusades, which touched a romantic vein in her, and she sensibly regretted that so little had been written about the ordinary life of the ordinary men and women from England, Scotland and France who had elected to stay on and make their homes in the East during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. I often wish, when I turn over records and look through indexes of Crusading history, that the by-no-means-unlikely name would catch my eye, and that I could write and tell her of some Syrian manor which had once been ruled by my lady Jehanetta de Somerville.

#### V. ACADEMIC

THERE is one famous historical site near Beirut to which I paid an early visit, the mouth of the Nahr-al-Kalb, or Dog River.

I have spoken of the broad coastal plain narrowing as one journeys northward, and, after the defile beneath Mr. Carmel and the sudden widening beyond (which leads down to Armageddon), becoming a mere shelf of rock at the Ladder of Tyre. From Tyre to Beirut it again widens sufficiently to provide easy passage, and even foraging ground, for an army. But a few miles north of the town the route enters another defile complicated by a difficult river crossing—the gorge of the Nahr-al-Kalb.

So pleased were the early Pharaohs with their successes in getting troops through this barrier, that they carved self-congratulatory inscriptions on the cliffs. Succeeding conquerors, Babylonian, Assyrian, Greek, and Roman, were not going to be outdone by mere Egyptians, and they also left their memorials on the rock, to celebrate their passage in the opposite direction, from north to south. Oddly enough, the passage never seems to have been disputed by a defending force except in A.D. 1100, when the Saracen Amirs waylaid Baldwin the Crusader, newly created King of Jerusalem. He burst through their ambush, but was hurrying to coronation in his capital, and had no time to stop and chip inscriptions in Latin or Norman French on the rocks.

I have often thought what a strangely large proportion of the world's greatest men of action have visited some part of the shores that lie between Haifa and Tripoli. I can imagine Alexander the Great and Julius Cæsar, Cœur de Lion and Hannibal and Saladin, still disputing with the Pharaohs and Nebuchadnezzar in the next world how best to march an army along the coast road. Napoleon may be taking part in the argument, and it is almost a pity that our Sidney Smith stopped him so short as Acre. The *savants* and archaeologists whom he brought with him on his Eastern campaign would have had a high time with the then indecipherable hieroglyphics of the Dog River inscriptions; and there can be little doubt that he would have added a characteristic contribution of his own. It is a poor substitute to find the fine plaque carved by the generals of his nephew Napoleon III, when they landed in 1860 to rescue the Maronite Christians from massacre by Turks and Druses. But the series is happily completed by memorials carved for the passage of Allenby's army in 1918 and of the British and Free French forces in the summer of 1941.

One who is interested in history cannot fail to look forward to visiting this lamp-post on which the dogs have been leaving their reminders of so many centuries. I must confess to a little disappointment when I first came to it myself. The most inviting-looking gorge was blocked by barbed wire and French sentinels guarding a *passage interdit*. The shoreward ledges were alive with roadmakers and hideous with the roar of their cement-churns and rock-drills. I failed to find Nebuchadnezzar's cuneiform at all, and probably missed many others. But I was to have later and quieter opportunities to visit the Dog River mouth.

Meanwhile I was in somewhat unenterprising mood, and did most of my historical research by poking my nose into books.

Beirut possesses two Universities, both with libraries open to the outsider and attractive to the historian. The first is dedicated to St. Joseph and directed by French Fathers of the Society of Jesus. One of these, with whom I struck up a particular friendship, was a great lover of English things and a great enthusiast for boy-scouting. The second University was of American foundation and too Protestant to be named after any saint. I am myself Protestant, but I took an impious delight in bringing the wife of the principal into the next seat at dinner with my Jesuit scoutmaster, and quoting to them the original Charter of the American University (1860), wherein



*A SHOCKING QUARTREL in the HAUT  
MONDE of K-NG-D-M C-ME, concerning  
the best tacticks for the invasion of  
SYRIA*

CASUS BELLI

*With apologies to  
James Gilray (1757-1815)*



moneyed worthies from New England decided that a new University must be founded to rescue the poor people of Beirut from being educated 'by Jesuits and such-like persons'. I am glad to say that my such-like friend took the joke in the best of spirits.

If a good site were all, the American University of Beirut could register a triumph, not only over poor St. Joseph, tucked away in his nook-shotten lane off the Damascus Road, but over every other University in the world. Its buildings are uninspired to the point of being almost eyesores. But its site, with the gardens and rocky slopes breaking down to the playing-fields and the foreshore, and with the view across the blue waters to the massive glories of Mount Lebanon, is enough to make Oxford and Cambridge forget their architectural pre-eminence and feel a little jealous.

It is self-contained within railings climbable, and no doubt frequently climbed (as is only right and proper), by its more high-spirited undergraduates. It is a little world of its own, though most kindly and hospitably disposed towards all comers. Thereby hangs a tale, though I cannot vouch for its accuracy. I can only re-tell it as it was told to me by one who was an undergraduate there in 1914.

As soon as war broke out, a determined Pasha came hurrying down from Istanbul to close the American University of Beirut and take over its premises for the Turkish Army. He was met under the gateway by the equally determined Principal, then a Dr. Bliss. He was buttonholed and conducted on a two days' tour round and round the students' lodgings, the laboratories, laundry, workshops, professors' house, hospital and dispensary, the whole smoothly-running organization of that independent little world. On the evening of the second day, the completely converted Pasha called all the students together in the assembly hall, told them that he had seen enough to convince him that the work of the American University was vital to the life of the Turkish Empire, and that it must be carried on.

It was carried on, behind guarded gates, through the four years of the war, even after America had joined the Allies. When the Turkish Government decided to starve the Lebanon, and hundreds of famished corpses lay in the streets of Beirut, special shiploads of food were sent for the A.U.B., and Dr. Bliss would sally forth to the harbour and drive back on the flour-wagons himself. He knew what he was defending: the Ivory Tower of Learning must be held and provisioned at any cost.



The story, surely a creditable one to all parties, has rather a saddening epilogue. When Allenby marched into Beirut and the broken armies of the enemy were fleeing miles to the northward, a battery of British guns drove into the A.U.B. and unlimbered on the *campus*. Dr. Bliss went straight to the commander of Allenby's artillery. For four years, he said, there had been Turkish sentinels outside the gates, but no armed men had presumed to set foot inside. For four years the grounds of the University had been sacred to learning, to culture and common sense. Now that the emergency was over, he must demand that the senseless engines of slaughter be immediately removed from the precincts they had dared to desecrate.

The commander of artillery looked at the champion of Letters, and just could not understand what the old man was babbling about. The position had been chosen because it commanded the best field of fire in the area and there could be no question of changing it. The guns must stay where they were.

They say that Bliss came back from the interview a broken-hearted man. There was something that he, too, could not understand. While he had been shut away, humanity had reached and crossed a new watershed beyond which the values that he had been bred to reverence were already beginning to look meaningless. Perhaps no one would be the better for it, and certainly thousands would find themselves in a narrower, harsher and less discriminating world. But it is useless to argue with Time. Between 1914 and 1918, perhaps for the first time since Rome collapsed and the barbarians had their way, the idea of Total War had crept back into Christendom.

## VI. CRUSADING

THERE was a third library in Beirut, which fed my historical hunger. It was lodged in a most un-academic building, the otherwise bare top storey of the French Officers' Club, the ground floor of which was given over to the more common-sense activities of eating, drinking and making friends.

I made many good ones there, including a most warm-hearted and companionable officer from the Royal Yugoslav Air Force, who, when posted away, could not leave Beirut without coming round to my office to plant two hearty but embarrassing kisses on my cheeks. I made some friends among the French themselves: my closest French

friend, of whom more anon, I had to meet elsewhere because, in spite of a good war record and an exceptionally fine brain, he could not get himself raised from Corporal's to Commissioned rank until after I left Beirut.

I most frequently split a bottle of good local wine there with my C.O.'s factotum, a young man also of Irish birth who rose from Lieutenant to Captain during our acquaintance. He was Irish in liking a fight, and when he arrived at the office in certain moods, we all wondered with what other Institution, British, French or Lebanese, we were going to be embroiled before sundown. In another twenty years he will be governing a colony, and in spite of occasional flare-ups, governing it pretty well. He was also a Roman Catholic and, as such, had interesting views about the Crusades.

As you emerge from the French Officers' Club on to the sea-front, you are greeted by a disagreeable—what the ribald might call a medieval—smell. It comes from some ancient foundations, washed by the warm waves of the Mediterranean, upon which once stood a castle. Turn right, pass through some equally malodorous modern streets, turn right again up the *Rue Allenby*, and you will soon come upon the principal mosque of Beirut. If it is not too late (or a Friday) you can go inside. If it is, you would do better to stop and look up at its façade. In either case you will soon see that it is, or was, a Christian church of the thirteenth century, almost undistinguishable from hundreds in the larger villages of England or France. The razed fortress and the desecrated shrine are only two among a myriad reminders, scattered through Palestine, Syria and the Lebanon, telling that this strip of Asia was once a part of Christian Europe.

There are no eternal laws of history; but there are certain phenomena that go on recurring with curious persistence in past epochs of Time, epochs which seem fantastically difficult in date, atmosphere and circumstance; unless we find means to alter our own natures radically, they will probably continue to recur in the future. One of these may be stated thus: When any large unit of men and women finds itself newly organized under a single sovereignty—whether for military defence, for commercial profit or in the name of some abstract idea—it is immediately tempted to take aggressive action against less unified neighbours, with all the brutality and injustice, all the heroism and self-sacrifice, which such aggression implies. You will find records of this phenomenon on the monuments of Ancient Egypt

and Babylon. You can trace it in the history of our own country, hammered into a new unity by the organizing genius of Edward I, and immediately embarking on a career of aggression against Wales, Scotland and disunited France. You can hear its echo in the sound of the bombs that have burst and are still bursting round London. Germany and Italy, the two great powers most recently united under a single sovereignty, are now the most viciously aggressive.

Europe as a whole has never been united under such a single sovereignty. It has never expanded as a whole. Its aggressions against America, Asia and Africa were made by sections in bitter rivalry with each other; the way was led by Spain and then Holland, as they achieved union under their monarchical and republican sovereignties. But there was a moment, towards the end of the eleventh century, when European Christendom felt a kind of unity, accepted (with many reservations) the temporal sovereignty of the Pope, and suddenly launched out into that act of aggression against disunited Islam, which we call the First Crusade.

This temporarily successful expansion (the first conquests were held for some eighty years) was made in the name of abstract ideals. It proved hectic, fitful, and ill-supported, precisely because the unity was insecure and the sovereignty of the Pope contested. It petered out into apathy, dissension, and piecemeal plundering raids. But it has left its mark, and not merely upon the sights and smells of Beirut. It has stamped itself for ever upon the legend and spirit of two continents, two great religions, and nothing will ever efface that stamp.

We may well wish that it had never happened. The peoples of Europe and Asia might perhaps be better disposed towards each other if they had not once been in such deadly enmity, unfortunately when both were at a somewhat unattractive stage of development. Islam at the end of the eleventh century has been described as the stinking remnants of a great civilization, and its warfare was disfigured by such internal jealousies, such foul murders and treacheries, such willingness to co-operate with the infidel enemy, as justly provoked the Christians' contempt. The Crusaders themselves, boasting of a 'Chivalry' which had a very different meaning from its modern one, showed such arrogance, brutality and bad faith towards the Saracen (almost counting those crimes as virtues) as have left the impression, which still lingers in some Arabic minds, that the Westerner is always to be feared, never to be trusted.

All this is, of course, only half the story, though it (or rather the

part which deals with Christian failings) is that on which modern European historians have strangely conspired to gloat. Yet one can still hear, in the *cafés* and homes of Syria, such tales of Saladin and Cœur-de-Lion as are clearly pointed by admiration for both parties and rancour for neither. It is unwise for historians to pour too much slander down the sepulchres of the dead men who cannot rise to refute it. The accusations hurled at the imaginary figures of our own ancestors may prove to be

‘ . . . as if a man should spit against the wind,  
The filth returns in his face.’

And it is likely that the romantic inspiration of the Crusading story, re-established on a basis of scientifically ascertained fact, will outlast all the carplings of the cynic, the atheist and the atrocity-monger.\*

I have suggested that the date when Peter the Hermit's preaching (among a hundred other factors) launched the First Crusade takes us into a period of our development rather unattractive to the modern mind. It is at least a date easy for an Englishman to remember: he has only to add 30 to the best known of all numerals and get 1096.

The year has some significance. One of William the Conqueror's sons, Robert of Normandy, joined Godfrey de Bouillon and the Baldwins in the great eastward march. There can be little doubt that among his men would be a few hard-boiled veterans who could remember the long day through which they had been defied by King Harold's bodyguard, on Hastings ridge, the long night that had at last closed down upon a defeated England, which the sovereignty of Wessex had attempted to unify before the hour was ripe.

## VII. HISTORIAN WANTED

I AM wound up now, and cannot stop, until the end of this chapter. I have mounted my hobby-horse and must ride where he chooses to gallop. So if any reader feels that he cannot be interested in History, however novelly presented, he had better skip to the beginning of Chapter IV, and save himself from unnecessary boredom.

\* The stories about Saladin and Richard were picked up by a friend of mine in Hamah, most conservative and Muslim of all Syrian towns. A good example of the gloating is Mr. Lane-Poole's excellent but one-sided biography of Saladin.

Doomsday will probably find men still arguing whether history is an art or a science. To me, it seems clearly both. The most painstaking research into problems of date and place have little historical value unless they are illumined by an interpretative, almost a creative, imagination. Literary skill, insight in generalization, vivid re-creation of a past atmosphere, all these make for fiction and speculation rather than history, unless they are based on a sound and detailed knowledge of what actually occurred.

On both counts, it is important that the human race should go on rewriting its own story. Not only is fresh evidence for ever accumulating. Old-established facts need restatement from the fresh standpoints that modern social and political developments suggest. The canvas needs repatching, and the picture on it must be repainted, if it is to mean anything to each succeeding generation.

It is not at first sight obvious why the Crusades should attract a scientifically minded writer. New material, whether in documents or by digging, has accumulated but slowly for the last fifty years. The mass of the evidence was sifted by good scholars fifty years ago, and they had one advantage over us, in still being able to feel and understand the theological enthusiasms which played so large a part in the Crusades and have now, for the most part, grown unintelligible to most. But we cannot rest entirely satisfied with the results of the Victorian researches, especially since no genius appeared among the scholars to handle them. We feel that the mental climate of our own age enables us to understand certain things that our grandfathers neglected or ignored. And the deeper we dig into the original documents, the stronger that impression becomes.

It is certainly strengthened by a few years of military and political service in the Near East. We of the M.E.F. feel that we know something of the lie of the land which was missed by those who worked in libraries, however sumptuously equipped with books and atlases, in Oxford or Paris or Berlin. We have watched, and some of us have taken part in, the queer game of Levantine politics: we wonder whether modern lip-service to Parliamentary Democracy produces such very different results from those of ancient subservience to a Council of Barons or a Divan of Ulema and Amits. Our Arabic-speaking friends find some misgivings at the overwhelming proportions of our history books that are written by men who knew no word of their language. And I know officers of one unit of M.E.F. who are puzzled by attempts to describe cavalry campaigns made

by scholars who seem to know nothing of the breeding and care of horses, and less than nothing of the difficult art of managing a lance from the saddle.

We feel that there are many excellent descriptions of the intrigues and enthusiasms which roused half a million, possibly a million, men, women and children from their homes in Western Europe, sent them in a mad rush across seas and mountains and left a bare twenty thousand to close round the walls of Jerusalem. But we are far less satisfied with the standard account of the colony which those survivors founded and maintained: of the *liaison* problems it had to face (as when a mixed fleet of English, Norwegians and Italians attacked Sidon from the sea while an army of Frenchmen and Germans beleaguered it by land) and especially of the *poulains*, the little sahibs and memsahibs who were born in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and grew up among subservient Asiatic households. They developed a few Oriental vices, but had always to be ready to leave comfort and luxury behind, and ride out to die in defence of the gravely imperilled community that had given them birth. In that matter perhaps civilizations have changed less than our grandfathers hoped, and we can apply certain lessons we have recently learned to the understanding of our remoter ancestors.

There are also the specialists, who consider that their pet subject has never had the treatment it deserves. The economic historians may soon have collected enough rent-rolls and manorial records to make a coherent story of the agricultural development of the period. Even its commercial history needs rewriting, and would make an interesting story. It is fascinating to watch the calculating self-interest of the Italians outwitting Greek cunning and Norman aggressiveness and milking the hither end of the rich caravan routes which led down from Central Asia or up to the West African coast. There are legal students who find in the *Assizes of Jerusalem* fresh matter to illumine the difficulties of applying abstract principles of justice to a restless human family whose actions are so largely prompted by fraud, greed and complacency. Churchmen working for reunion between the Western and Eastern Churches can learn how not to proceed from the failure of a similar attempt in twelfth-century Palestine. [Conservative politicians could learn from the collapse of the Kingdom what weakness and corruption can flourish under mere Tradition, unsupported by energy. And even a critic of Communism, studying the development of the great crusading

Orders, could show how men who have abandoned all thought of personal gain can remain disastrously acquisitive for their communal organization: one does not destroy the profit-motive by merely pooling it.

It almost looks as if the history of the civilization the Crusaders founded in Beirut and Jerusalem, and just failed to found in Cairo, might be worth rewriting from a purely scientific point of view. One should, perhaps, touch very briefly on the Europe from which they came, a patchwork of puzzling and contradictory loyalties, menaced by internal strife and external invasion, explaining some of the ruthless severities the Crusaders inflicted on the East. Indeed they need little explanation to a generation like ours, whose newspapers contain daily accounts of our wholesale massacre of civilians, women and children. That remote and yet comprehensible Europe has already been well investigated and described. As for the counter-reactions upon it of its own aggression, the effects upon it of the Crusades, our new scientific historian hardly needs to go over the familiar ground of what the Crusaders brought back with them from the East. If anyone was returning to England or France in the twelfth century to talk about algebra and alcohol, to plant apricots or build horseshoe arches, it is more likely that he had come fresh from fighting Moorish 'Admirals' on Spanish soil or from a captivity in Andalusia which had enabled him to see and admire the Alhambra.\*

If the details of the story may well tempt the scientific researcher, here can be little doubt of its universal significance. The Past has given birth to our Present, which is in turn shaping the Future. Running through all is one thread of superlative importance—an agelong struggle wherein the Crusades are a not unimportant incident. It is the struggle of Europe against Asia and Africa for the control of the Mediterranean basin, beginning, probably, long before recorded history, first chronicled in the mixture of truth and legend that gathered round the siege of Troy and certainly not set at rest by modern Europe's present preponderance in arms. Shakespeare described this long-drawn-out conflict as "the World's Debate". It may well continue until the end of the world.

The canvas of such patient research as the Crusades merit offers the artist a most enticing background for a great picture.

\*I have never seen the suggestion in print, but I cannot help wondering whether it was the Crusaders who introduced into Europe the four-poster bed. They cannot have imitated it from the Arabs, who sleep all over the place, but they may have developed it themselves as a frame on which to hang curtains and keep out mosquitoes.

It can never lack in pageantry, even if we strip it of its foolish anachronisms, the heraldry, the plumes and plate-armour of Victorian engravings, and re-substitute the more business-like leather and chain-mail of the early Crusaders.

It has its touches of humour, such as the solemn gathering of the soldiers at Shaizar to investigate the strange case of a shirt that reeked of cheese after innumerable washings, and their discovery that the old laundrywoman was using a lump of cheese in place of a cake of soap. There is a grim comedy implicit in the whole story of that old reprobate, Renaud de Châtillon, the Lord of Kerak and Oultre-Jordan. He shared the modern prejudice against bishops, and tied one up, soundly whipped and smeared with honey, to see how many flies he would attract. When ordered to preserve a hard-won truce with Islam and do nothing to wound Muslim susceptibilities, he built a fleet at Kerak, carried it piecemeal on camel-back over 200 miles of desert to the Red Sea, and launched it there in the hope of raiding Islam's most sacred shrine at Mecca.

Like all stories in human history, it has its scenes of horror, the inexcusable carnage in the mosque of 'Umar, and the filth of the Assassins' murders. At one moment a lightning flash shows us Humphrey de Toron fighting out his last fight at Baniyas after he had been struck by the arrow that burrowed its way through his nose and forced a head out beneath his chin. At another we are listening to the long thunder-roll of triumph wherewith the Arabic chronicler describes the Christian disaster at Hattin—"If you had numbered only the multitudes of the prisoners awaiting slavery, you would have said, "Then were none of the infidels slain?" If you had seen only the vast heaps of corpses, you would have asked, "Then were none of them taken alive?"

Of heroism and of pathos, there can never be any lack. If I were asked to choose a point at which both seem most movingly to meet, I think it would be the somewhat neglected story of Baldouin IV, the last effective king to reign in Jerusalem\* and perhaps the loneliest, most tragic figure in all human history.

Deprived of his mother in early childhood by the divorce that the prelates demanded, orphaned and crowned in his teens, just after

\* Two kings reigned after him in Jerusalem, a baby and a handsome young nincompoop whom one may call ineffective without fear of contradiction. Then came the disaster at Hattin, the collapse of the whole kingdom before Saladin's onslaught, and Richard Cœur de Lion's vain attempt to reconquer it from the few coastal towns that survived.



he had heard from the doctors of the creeping horror that must one day destroy him: cut off by leprosy from friendship and bodily ease and all hope of marriage: crippled and blinded by the disease and yet insisting, when he could no longer sit a horse, that he be carried by litter into council or battle: struggling to restore the weakening sovereignty against disobedient subordinates and treacherous allies, to defend a tiny and discordant kingdom against the unified weight of Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo: forced to pit his own simple and clouding wits against one of the first-class brains of history, against the patient cunning of that enigmatic Kurd whom we call Saladin. He was dead before he was 28, and that is the happiest part of his story. He did not live to see Renaud de Châtillon's final jests plunge a whole people into incurable disasters. He did not live to see the corpses and captives of Hattin.

Such are the scientific facts awaiting re-investigation. Such are the materials for the new picture that a master-hand might paint.

There is one sense, and no mean one, in which we do not need a new historian of the Crusaders. We have one already. In 32 lines of verse a modern, indeed ultra-modern, poet has summed up much that the Victorians missed, and given us a dozen new sidelights on the whole subject. He begins by showing what my old Scottish lady knew and wanted to know more of—that the Crusaders were men and women not unlike ourselves. He goes on to touch upon the moral sloughs which pilgrims and *poulains* alike encountered and by which they were often tainted. The superb schoolboy lift of the twentieth line begins to carry us far above the cynics and the carpers, and the last two ratify the idealist's triumph over them, while showing that true *vers libre* can have all the terse bite of an eighteenth-century rhymed epigram. It is so good, and so much to the point, that I am stealing most of it (with his kind permission) to make a poetic close to my own pedantic chapter.

### THE CRUSADES

There came one who spoke of the shame of Jerusalem,  
And the holy place defiled,  
Peter the Hermit, scourging with words.  
And among his hearers were a few good men,  
Many who were evil,  
And most who were neither,  
Like all men in all places.

Some went for love of glory,  
Some went who were restless and curious,  
Some were rapacious and lustful.  
Many left their bodies to the kites of Syria  
Or sea-strewn along the routes.  
Many left their souls in Syria,  
Living on, sunken in moral corruption.  
Many came back well broken,  
Diseased and beggared, finding  
A stranger at the door in possession,  
Came home cracked with the sun of the East  
And the seven deadly sins in Syria.

But our King did well at Acre,  
And in spite of all the dishonour,  
The broken standards, the broken lives,  
The broken faith, in one place and another,  
There was something left that was more than the tales  
Of old men on winter evenings.  
Only the Faith could have done what was good of it  
(Whole Faith of a few,  
Part-faith of many),  
Not avarice, lechery, treachery,  
Envy, sloth, gluttony, jealousy, pride.  
It was not these that made the Crusades,  
But these that un-made them.

T. S. ELIOT.

*Chorus from The Rock.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AMBULANDO

" . . . over whose acres walked those blessed feet  
Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nailed,  
For our advantage, to the bitter cross."

I HENRY, IV. i. 25.

#### I. NAPOLEONIC

IF we had eschewed formal leave from Cairo, taking our occasional excursions (for instance to Jerusalem or Cyprus) on official business, we were more sensible at Beirut. After six months I applied, successfully, for a week's leave and decided to spend it in redeeming my vow and seeing a little more of Galilee. I began by getting a lift to Acre, which I had buzzed past more than once, when business took me to Haifa, without bothering to visit it.

It is well worth a visit. It is small—far smaller than it was in the days of Cœur de Lion. It is tidier and more comprehensible than sprawling Beirut, and picturesque in a more Oriental manner. It is much cleaner than Tyre or Sidon. It has no particular 'gem' of architecture such as guide-books love to describe in detail, but it centres round the jolliest little mosque, with a grass-green dome and cabs waiting outside. Its narrow streets and alleys make an intricate pattern, but are full of unexpected charm. On the west side there is a broad open street and then a sea-washed wall, the ramparts and bastions of which afford a delightful series of enfiling peeps along its rocky foundations. On near-by beaches one sees, as at Tyre and Sidon, the great wooden skeletons at which carpenters are sawing and hammering in order to make ships.

It retains few memorials of Sir Sidney Smith's days, though his name is kindly remembered among the Christians. After he and his frigates had stiffened the Turkish defence and thrown back the French armies who had hoped to march through it to India, he made himself unpopular with the Turkish Government by championing its Christian subjects. He did much to prevent the persecution whereby the Turks were hoping to work off their anti-French rancour, as soon as the tramp of boots and the strains of the Marseillaise had died away, along the road back to Egypt. The name of

his great opponent still clings to "Napoleon's Hill", a low mound of greensward which overlooks Acre from the East. But it sheltered Saladin's camp 600 years before Napoleon was born or thought of: it is one of those many "Tells" which, like Taanach and Megiddo, were fortified cities long before Thothmes brought his horses and chariots up the Wadi Arah and down into the coastal plain.

I spent two nights on a hospitable sofa in a little bungalow outside Acre, where a Scottish District Commissioner and his Irish wife lived in happy comradeship with a horse, a dog, a dozen rabbits, and one hen. On the intervening Sunday they took me to climb Jarnak and look from its summit across all northern Palestine, before motoring back along the wild country of the Syrian border. Here we saw an eagle, and hoped, in vain, to see one of the leopards which are not uncommon in the hills. We also saw the vast stretch of barbed-wire fencing erected to prevent rebels, spies and smugglers from passing between Palestine and Syria, and the large gaps which smugglers, spies and rebels have made in it in order to lead their well-laden camels across the frontier.

We talked of many things that evening, particularly of Nyasaland, where my host and his wife had previously been working. They told me of a vast and long-extinct volcano crater, where many square miles of jungle were cut off as a game preserve, in which strange beasts could wander unmolested by man; on the topmost lip of it is a rest-house, where, though near the Equator, one must keep a fire alight through winter days and summer nights. Their tales made Acre, for all its Crusading and Napoleonic memories, seem a trifle suburban.

## II. GALILEAN

My host was a wise man and rose betimes. Early on Monday morning he was whisking me in his car into the hills of Galilee. He had an appointment at Nazareth, and we reached that thriving centre for long-distance motor buses while it was still cool and fresh.

It is a pleasant enough place, but I saw no point in visiting the alleged sacred spots. My historical reading convinces me that they were chosen, in comparatively recent times, with an eye on nothing except the tourist's pocket. No tradition could have survived the centuries during which Nazareth was a heap of rubble, haunted by Muslim brigands who could occasionally catch an unwary pilgrim,

rob him and slit his throat. Only the so-called Mary's Well is likely to occupy the authentic site where our Lord's Mother and her neighbours drew water for their households.

I did not even take advantage of the many buses. I was carrying all I wanted, and more, in my army pack, including a heavy and most unnecessary mackintosh. I was prepared for a week's walking, and was only sorry it was not a month's.

I marched out of Nazareth past a series of sanitarily-isolated refuse-dumps, and soon found myself in a fairylike little gorge, full of caves, rock-plants and miniature precipices, where I could not help hoping that Jesus once played at robbers with his school-friends. I came out on a ledge of turf overlooking a vividly green plain, part of Esdraelon, the fertility of which was obviously being well exploited by recent Jewish settlements. Beyond, and to my left, rose the 'little hill of Hermon'. This is not an ironical misnomer for the vast snow-capped peak, but the somewhat confusing title for its smaller namesake, a green bump beneath which nestles En-dor, no longer the abode of witches. Behind and out of sight, lies Gilboa, where Saul killed himself to avoid capture in battle, and Beth-shan, where the Philistines nailed his dead body to the walls.

I wheeled left and made my way edgewise, down towards the plain. I soon came in sight of the steep cone of Mount Tabor, my first objective: but the going was now so soggy that it took me the better part of the day to reach the summit, though not as long as I was told by the mounted Palestine policeman who misdirected me.

There is a Franciscan convent on top of Mount Tabor. The numerous Italian friars had been removed from it to internment, but I was made most welcome by the three who remained, a most impressive old Spanish superior, a robust and red-haired Czech, and a very young but very intelligent American. I ate and slept soundly in their guest-room, and plunged next morning down the steep slope of their mountain. I was followed closely by their large dog, which seemed to have appropriated me for the day and accompanied me half-way to the Sea of Galilee.

I was lucky in my season. I had passed rapidly through Galilee in September and found the slopes of its hills parched, brown and monotonous. I was returning in late March, when they were one huge garden of flowers. I waded up to the knee in familiar English meadow-blossom, in cyclamen and poppy, pink flax and wild lupin, growing to a quite un-English stature and luxuriance. As the Gospel

says, it today *is*, and tomorrow is cast into the oven—presumably the oven of June and July. But my today, my week's leave, was gay and fragrant with the transitory glory.

The birds were equally delightful at this season. Swarms migrating from Africa to Northern Europe are sensible enough to take a few days' rest among the flowers of Palestine. With the storks it is often a matter of weeks: their clumsy and comic majesty is the touch of humour that Nature added to her already abundant entertainment. Of the smaller migrants, swallows, swifts and martins are the most numerous, and best match the English flowers. The local lark, apparently a stay-at-home, is the greatest puzzle. He looks exactly like the shy and soaring musician of England, but he sings little, soars little, and is very far from shy. He hops about in front of one's feet until one is almost afraid of treading on him.

But there is, to me, a greater puzzle about the bird-life of Palestine and Syria, and it is one of diet. There seems to be quite a disproportionate number of birds of prey, and exceedingly little for them to prey on. Migrations over, there are far fewer eatable small birds than in England. One sees practically no small animals, rats, field-mice, voles or weasels. Wild rabbits are practically unknown, though there are a few hares for such large birds as can tackle them. But from the small and shapely kestrel to the vast buzzards and eagles, the Near East has such a profusion of birds of prey as makes England's bird-life seem like a tame aviary, kept by a pacifist in a garden suburb. The predatory lords of the Levantine air look sleek and well-fed, and no one has ever explained to me the mysteries of their larder. Perhaps they have learned, like certain Totalitarian States, to live upon one another's flesh.

Between Tabor and the Sea of Galilee, I passed through one delightful settlement of Jewish refugees whose red-roofed, creeper-covered cottages recalled some Grimm's Tale from pre-Nazi, pre-Prussianized Germany. It made a pleasing contrast to the ordinary Arab village, which is a pile of uninteresting cubes divided from each other by narrow and high-walled lanes, the surface of which alternates between hard cobbles and soft dungheaps. But if anyone thinks I am going to proceed from aesthetics to politics or draw any controversial conclusions about the rightful ownership of Palestine, he has, as the Yankees used to say, another think coming.

Galilee is good walking country, especially if you can manage your twenty or twenty-five miles a day, without undue hastening or

fatigue. Some of its most convenient halts are more than that apart by motor road, but short cuts across the hills reduce the distance, and bring you, incidentally, past good spots which the motorists miss. The worst of a holiday on wheels is that though one *can* generally park the car and walk where one wills on foot, one never *does*. Of the hundreds who hum down the smooth road into Tiberias (past the notice-board which tells you that you are already below the sea level of the Mediterranean) few, if any, trouble to stop and climb up the few hundred yards of slope on their left, again knee-deep in spring flowers, which would bring them up to the oddly-shaped Crest of the Horns of Hattin. It saw the last phase of the desperate battle about which I have already talked too much. It inspired Chesterton, long before he ever saw it, to the grand (if somewhat exaggerative) line of poetry:

And under the Horns of Hattin the hope of the world went down.

It is worth the walk, if only for the geological interest. It is the broken rim of an old volcano, which may once have had some connection with that really sinister gorge, the *Wadi Hamam*, leading down eastward to the water. The crest itself is far from sinister. Some beautifully spaced little pine-trees spring up from among the wild flowers. There are birds, and a cool breeze, and a wonderful view of lake and hills. Here the comic relief is provided by little tortoises, which negotiate their way through the flowers' stems with pompous caution. But 'Why Horns?' is a question I have asked myself several times, and never been able to answer.

Down by the water's edge there is an even more luxuriant verdure—though still surprisingly untropical—which lasts, I am told, the whole year round. I was so taught my Bible in childhood as to imagine all its scenes against an undiluted background of sand and palm-trees. I am glad to know now that many of the parables must have been first spoken amid furze and reeds, under trees not very different from our own. The shores in Gospel times were, of course, more populous than they are today, not merely with fishing villages like Magdala (which have now dwindled to a single house or barn) but also with pleasure-resorts for Roman officers and Civil Servants. People are beginning to dig up a surprising number of their villas on the farther shore, where the Gospels lead us to think of solitudes populated only by Gadarene swine ready to rush down the steep places to the sea. Today Tiberias alone, with its cocktail bars and

dancing floors, recalls that atmosphere in which our Lord must have done much of His preaching, an atmosphere of rich folk on holiday and poor men who toil all day within sight of their luxuries. If some of the Apostles were simple-minded men (though obviously 'simple' is the last word one could apply to such a sensitively complex being as St. John), they had not grown up in a spot remote from sophistications. Many difficult problems of Gospel history would soon grow easier if one could keep this fact in mind.

Nowadays the walk round the lakeside, from Tiberias northward to Capernaum, is lonely and rural enough. I was accompanied most of the way by a bored and indignant stork: he kept on flying a few hundred yards ahead, settling down with a weary flapping and folding of wings which said, "Why can't you leave a chap alone?" It took him some miles to realize that I was only walking to Capernaum, not deliberately and maliciously pursuing him. But he finally decided to give the notion a trial, flapped back over my head in the direction of Tiberias, and was quit of me for good.

It was also interesting to see the two breeds of kingfisher which haunt those reedy shores. One is of the same iridescent hues as our own, the other as dapper as a naval officer in blue-and-white stripings. Both are of the same stocky shape as the kingfisher we see by English streams, but three or four times his size, looking a little like woodpeckers.

The approach to Capernaum was an experience I can never forget. I first scrambled up a grassy slope and dropped down inside a spacious paved temple. It was recently, I believe, a mere mound by the shore, but someone decided to dig it up: it got all the archæologists quarrelling about its date and origin. I only know that it was quiet and infinitely lonely, with flagstones and courts and half-demolished walls that breathed an atmosphere in which Time stood still. Next came a great grove of ancient trees, nodding over the quiet water. The velvet carpet beneath them was grateful to sore feet, their dim gloom refreshing to sun-tired eyes. Beyond them the path passed along a curious slope of rock and thicket, stunted firs and miniature coves. At one moment I was reminded of a Japanese garden, at the next of something from Hans Andersen, then of the setting for some pre-Greek myth. All the world seemed to have contributed to this queer little sea-shore woodland and its slopes felt definitely haunted. I could not shake off the idea that I was being watched. I told myself that if I turned suddenly I might catch sight of a face bobbing back



behind some bush or rock. But I could not tell if it would be the face of a goblin, or of the Great Pan himself. I was in no way afraid and yet a kind of awe had settled on me. I found myself whispering '*Nunnen adest. Some god is here*'.

It is wise, at such moments, to linger and wonder and worship. They are rare enough, and perhaps form milestones in some pilgrimage of the spirit whose end we are not permitted to know. But it is certainly unwise to return again to the spot in the hope that the experience will be repeated. If you do, it is ten to one that you will find your haunted spot occupied by motor-trippers with a gramophone, or become a camping-ground for boy scouts. It is good that folk should enjoy themselves and make music, even tinned music: it is still better that they should camp and scout: but their presence banishes certain shy influences, which, in any case, will not reassert themselves merely because you have returned to the spot where you felt them before. They know their own times and places, and do not come for any calling.

I contemplated no return, I was grateful enough for an encouraging experience, and do not expect to have another for years.

I marched on round the north end of the lake. At Capernaum itself there are very extensive remnants of a synagogue, the inscriptions of which, if I remember rightly, place its building or rebuilding within our Lord's lifetime. It is of a mixed and debased Roman-Græco-Oriental style. One is tempted to think that it is the very one which the Roman centurion built for the Jews. The opening verses of St. Luke's 7th chapter give an excellent picture of that worthy sergeant-major who obviously stood no nonsense from his men, and spared no pains to be on good terms with the Jews, whom he had every temptation to bully and oppress. I think he would have liked to know that the proceeds of his well-earned pay were going to stand for nineteen centuries, long after the Empire he had helped to maintain had gone the way of all Empires.

But it was getting dark and the wind was rising. The waves of the lake were beginning to slap viciously at the shore. I made my way uphill to a convent on a knoll above Capernaum. I expected another monastic welcome, but found myself among army posters, gas masks and N.C.O.s. The building was requisitioned by the British Army, and the officer in charge discovered, within the first few minutes, that he had been my contemporary at Oxford; he even remembered a paper my brother had read there to a small circle of

English literature students. We were soon talking the 'Varsity shop of twenty years ago. It was not very long before I had forgotten that the world had once contained centurions, or might still shelter a goblin.

### III. UNMONASTIC

THE night proved as wild and stormy as it had promised by the lake-side, and the wind howled round our neo-Gothic windows.

Though the building was in the hands of the military, it was still patrolled by a puzzled old monk, who wandered round its corridors muttering to himself in a language that no one could identify, and suddenly ringing bells, when one least expected it, at hours that seemed to have no connection either with Mass or meals. No one knew where he slept or what he ate; there seemed to be an unsigned treaty of mutual non-recognition between him and the British Army.

The walls of the rooms exhibited an interesting palimpsest of decoration. They had originally been hung with tinted Victorian engravings of the Italian Old Masters depicting saintly ladies and gentlemen having their feet devoured by lions or their entrails removed, without anæsthetics. One also saw them enjoying the subsequent pleasures of Paradise. Round their dusty frames were now, drawing-pinned, a few Army orders about the importance of taking anti-malarial precautions or of saluting Allied officers. These alternated with a large number of film-star portraits or highly-coloured pictures from *Esquire* and *Men Only*, showing persons who could hardly be described as ladies, and certainly not as saints, getting and giving great pleasure by the scantiness of their costume. The effect was piquant rather than truly edifying, and I must leave it to the psychiatrists to decide whether or no it may have contributed to the old monk's bell-ringing derangement.

I was too tired to be either edified or stimulated, and I slept soundly, undisturbed by visions of Agatha (Virg. & Mar.) or hopes of Dietrich (Mar. but not Virg.).

I was up and off early next morning, after a short breakfast discussion of the Oxford English Literature School. I had to climb a little, for the land rises steeply north of Capernaum. I came out on a curious strip of country, not unlike Cambridgeshire—green meadows, reedbanks and willows, through which flow the innumerable little streams whose confluence makes the Upper Jordan. The

narrow plain slopes up to the north, seven to ten miles wide, between two rock-tipped ridges which resemble the Cambridgeshire hills rather less than chalk does cheese.

Down this corridor stares the snow-capped mass of the greater Hermon, which had, indeed, begun to beckon to me before I reached Tiberias. It dominates every northward view from the Sea of Galilee. The hills of Galilee itself seldom rise to the dignity of mountainhood. Carmel, which overshadows Haifa, has some fine wild slopes (where the rich men have not built villas on them), but it is a tame spectacle from a distance. Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon are on a far vaster scale, but they are ridges, showing few peaks. Hermon is also a ridge, but seen edgewise, as one sees it from Galilee, it is a single pointed mass, unique, and uniquely impressive.

Having made some rude and intolerant remarks on the subject of motor-cars, I am not at all ashamed to confess that I was glad of a lift along the road that leads up this valley. Cambridgeshire has its charms, but it is hardly ideal walking-country. I made a lazy day of it, walked over the hill to my left, and spent the afternoon and evening browsing round streets and a friend's bookshelves in the town of Safad.

I came back into the valley next day and made across country for Banias, which lies at the foot of Hermon. I walked past Dan, whose name reminds me (though I had not come all the way from Beer Sheba) that I was nearing the northern tip of Palestine and would soon be seeing the French uniforms that spelled Syria.

Dan is little more than a homestead now, a Jewish agricultural settlement. Near it is Dafni or Daphne, a stretch of green grassland on which stands a fine group of old oaks. To English eyes, the place suggests some squire's park, but the Mohammedans thought it a suitable place for a graveyard, and have placed there a number of square stone tombs.

I have been told that the oak-tree raises in the Muslim mind much the same funereal association as do the yew and cypress in ours; but I cannot say what tradition or psychological twist is behind this. I have often wondered whether our own ideas about yews are not coloured by the severely practical measures of our rustic ancestors. Each village would want its yew-trees from which to cut bows (though the best and most expensive, such as won us Agincourt, were probably made of the most reliable yew that was imported from Spain). But no village would want its embryo arsenal dotted

about in the unfenced fields, or strips of field, where cows could nibble at the dark green foliage and, if they did not poison themselves, certainly poison the taste of their milk. Since the churchyard was probably the only walled enclosure available, it was the obvious place to plant the yews: they may have acquired from this alone their associations with 'graves and worms and epitaphs'. I make the guess without supporting authority. I hope an expert Arabist can give a counter-suggestion about the oaks of the East.

Soon after leaving those of Daphne behind, I was out of Palestine, and into Southern Syria. I crossed the frontier unchecked and unexamined, without even showing an identity-card to prove that I was not a fifth columnist in British uniform. Such unnoticed entrances are always a pleasure to an Intelligence Officer on leave, especially when he spends his working-time perusing or compiling reports on all travellers passing any frontier, together with their age, religion, passport-number and other details of vital significance to the war effort. I found the frontier guards and customs officials after some difficulty. They were, very properly, drinking and playing cards outside a little café. I ordered them another drink and asked them to look after my pack while I made a telephone call. Then I inspected the village, which was Banias, and took a longish climb up to the ruins of the castle above it.

#### IV. ALTO

THE telephone call was to Marj-ayun, which also has a castle perched above it, Beaufort, truly glorious when the setting sun makes a silhouette of its windows and battlements.

I had been told the name of a French officer there and I at once recognized it. He had once taught me—and other commando hopefuls—in the outskirts of a Scottish town, how to jump over a fence in full equipment, in the dark, without making too much noise. He proved to be at home, and offered me a dinner and a bed. He also proved to be the cousin of my Jesuit friend from Beirut, who was then spending a week-end with him.

I shall not easily forget the evening they gave me, with talk and food and wine that were perfectly matched. We differed pleasantly on many subjects, enough to make interesting argument, and only deeply on one. They disliked Aragon, the contemporary writer who, to me, has best described the fall of France. They would not even

admit that he wrote good French, or even French at all. I said I was no judge of that, but felt sure that he wrote good poetry.

But I am anticipating. I was not yet at Marj-ayun. I had only telephoned and arranged for a bus to take me thither. Meanwhile there was Banias to be seen, and a climb to be taken to its castle ruins.

It was once Panias, presumably because some former inhabitant had had there an experience similar to mine at Capernaum, and attributed it to Pan. The place of his vision is still shown, a shallow cave where the Jordan (or part of it) wells up suddenly from the earth. Black goats appropriately browse around the over-arching entrance and the goatherd plays to them silly, irritating, inconsequential little tunes, on the pipes of Pan. But the whole place stinks like a sewer.

Roman Imperialism was having no nonsense about Pan, and rebuilt and rechristened the town *Cæsarea Philippi*. It was here that our Lord took the step which prevents most of the modern world from following Him, and made it clear that He was not just an enlightened teacher, but God incarnate. And when Peter put forward a rather obvious objection to the Divine plan, he received the sharpest of rebukes.

The sprawling village which is now Banias still bristles with Græco-Roman columns and fragments of bridge, with medieval towers and gate-houses to increase the archæological confusion. I threaded my way through them till I found a path, which first led me through damp meadows, but soon began to climb steeply towards the ruins of the castle.

It is called Qalaat-al-Namrûd, Nimrod's castle, and probably has about as much connection with the mighty hunter as have England's innumerable "Cæsar's Camps" and "Oliver's Batteries" with the First Emperor of Rome or the last (please God) "Protector" of England. It was built in Crusading times or possibly before, on a spur of Mount Hermon, cut off from the main mass by a deep, wild gorge. It was originally a Saracen fortress, until Fulk of Anjou, third King of Jerusalem, took it from Zengi of Aleppo by help of Saracen allies from Damascus. He used a siege-tower so lofty that the garrison "seemed to fight with angels rather than with men". He must have brought it piecemeal up the stony track I followed, nearly a two hours' climb from the town. If the walls covered their present extent of ground (with room for pasture and recreation inside them) they must have left Fulk little flat space on which to

assemble his siege-train. Even then the job would have to be done on the edge of steep slopes and within easy range of arrows from the Saracens on the ramparts. But he took the place from them, and made Nimrod's castle into a Christian home and stronghold.

I must say something later of the Crusaders' castles, so much vaster, as well as higher-perched, than most of their counterparts in Europe. Qalaat-al-Namrūd is not so well preserved as many: its peak is covered by acres of mere ruined foundations, among the stones of which the wind whistles and the lizards skitter. It commands as magnificent a view as any site of human habitation, and it raised, in me at least, such feelings as cannot well be expressed in prose. They were already forming themselves into a kind of free verse as I stamped down hill, dazed with beauty, to pick up my pack at the *café* and find the bus which would carry me to the enlightened dining-table where I disputed about Aragon's poetry with the soldier and the priest.

### NIMROD'S CASTLE

Here aloft dart lizards through the sun-parched grasses,  
Freeze to stone on stone.  
Here hangs hawk, steely-eyed, contemptuous,  
Level with my eye, level with the ruins:  
Hangs above a chasm,  
Fifty, sixty fathoms:  
Hovers unwinking, with Hermon for a back-cloth,  
Tawny against tawny.

Ever the wind blows,  
Ever shale slips downward,  
Sliver by sliver, filling up the chasm:  
Millions of years to fill the sixty fathoms.  
Time is Lord of all things,  
Needs not count his millions,  
Leaves me here an instant,  
High. Quiet. Alone.

Mottled-grey boulders, once a hall's foundations.  
Wind-stunted thorn-trees rooted in their fissures.  
Grass stalks rustle stiffly.  
Far off silver Jordan,

Hundred-brooklet Jordan, tinkles through the pasture.  
I cannot hear them, hear the hundred tinkles.  
I am alone here, hung half-way to Heaven.  
Hermon above me.

Here rustled silk once, tapped the shoe on planking.  
Here they danced and mated, bore their children, kissed here.  
Here men scratched with pens at letters, bills, account-rolls,  
Heard, through opened windows, ring of boots on flagstone.  
Sons that ride a-hunting, a-mating, ride to battle.  
Tackle, weddings, harness, all must be paid for.  
Scratch, scratch, the pen.

Children chased children round the trunks of orchard.  
Cow crunching hay here, milk for twenty servants  
Meat for next Christmas.

New and trim the walls then,  
Hung with painted curtains.  
Lady bobs to lady, my dress to your dress,  
Carpets spread beneath us, where the grass will rustle.

Children to be scolded,  
Men coaxed or begged from,  
Wages, clothes, new curtains. . . .

Here was a home then,  
Men and women sleeping,  
Half-way to Heaven.  
You, sir, and you, miss,  
Far away in cities,  
Eating, sleeping, kissing,  
Turning on the wireless,  
Are you very different?

Here they were happy, bored or broken-hearted,  
Giggled, yawned, wept here.  
Nothing now but lizards,  
Steel-eyed hawk, shale slipping.  
Time, the lord of all things,

Split this hill from Hermon  
Tens of million years back.  
Time will bring to ruin  
You, sir, and you, miss,  
You and all your cities.  
Time could replant them  
On this spur of Hermon.  
Skyscrapers, cinemas,  
(Grass where London roars now)  
Hermon bright, with sky-signs.  
Time could play that joke,  
He who plays with Empires,  
Cools a Sun, kicks planets  
Round and round the goalpost,  
Lord and thief and jester.  
Read me his riddle.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# CABALLERO

“ ‘The time has come,’ the Walrus said,  
To talk of many things:  
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—  
Of cabbages—and Kings:  
And why the sea is boiling hot,  
And whether pigs have wings.”  
*Alice Through The Looking-Glass.*

### I. PANIFIABILITY

THERE are only two methods of locomotion worthy a wise man's preoccupation—walking and riding a horse. Of the first, I have had full pleasure in my life, from rambles round my home in the Chilterns to more arduous tramps over the Pyrenees (which wore out in a week one excellent pair of Plimsoll shoes I was wearing, and forced me to buy another in Spain before returning) and a long twenty-four hours (almost continuously sunlit) over the great ridge that divides Norway from Sweden. But I have spent far too little time on horseback, partly through poverty, more often through a lack of enterprise whereof I am properly ashamed.

Still, it was hardly matter for shame if my ride over Naseby battlefield was my last for four years. I looked back on it less as an exercise in horsemanship than as a peep into that local tradition which is, in most places, so sparse on the subject of our Civil Wars. There are many countrysides where Charles II is remembered as a young fugitive from search-patrols after Worcester fight or even as a middle-aged patron of horse-breeding and horse-racing—but few that have anything to say about his father's horseback wanderings, marches and battles in the decisive campaigns that covered half the counties of England.

I am in no way ashamed of my permanent lack of interest in horse-racing and betting; they seem to me side-paths off the main and essential tracks of life, excellent for those who are interested in them (so long as they are not enticed too far) but no great loss to those who are not. In point of fact I have attended exactly two race meetings in my life. The first was at Liverpool, twenty years ago, when I was timid, callow and alone. A buxom and unpleasantly intoxicated woman decided that I had a kind face and attached herself to me in

the (vain) hope of wheedling out of me the price of some more drink. I spent so much time trying to find some polite way of detaching myself that I hardly saw any horses and certainly made no bet.

I attended my second in Beirut in the more congenial company of my septuagenarian friend from Kyrene, the expert on ships, and again had proof of the smallness of the world. Almost the first person we encountered was an ex-officer of the Commando in which I had served as a humble N.C.O. He was now a major in one of the few cavalry regiments that still ride horses. We had a moment's chat, and before we passed on to our seats, he extended to me the warmest invitation to spend my next leave in his mess. I suppose it was again sloth, with a tincture of diffidence, that made me let a long time slip by before I applied for leave for the purpose.

I tracked him down with some difficulty, in a remote Syrian valley beyond the Orontes: the mess consisted of a camp table under a walnut tree, a broken sofa for bench, and several dozen copies of *The Field*, *Country Life* and the *Sporting and Dramatic*, mostly dated 1939 or 1940. The full complement of British officer personnel totalled two, my friend the major and myself. He had a small, very choice library of a dozen or so books in a wooden box. I had brought a few of my own: but I was quite glad not to read for a week. I was fully occupied in talking to him, in bathing, in remembering how to ride, and then in riding.

The bathing was done in an excellent concrete irrigation-pool, around which, indeed, the camp had originally been sited, in order to provide water for the horses. Its 'cool, silver shock' of water, running straight down from the hilltops, was a vast improvement on jumping into the Mediterranean Sea at Beirut and finding it, if not 'boiling hot', unpleasantly warm. Diving into the pool at mid-day, as the major remarked, produced the same effect as throwing a red-hot horseshoe into a bucket of cold water. The surface seemed to sizzle and steam. The diving could be done from the flagged edge or, by the valiant, from the top of a high wall, beneath which was a *cheval de frise* of iron spikes. Having once been valiant, I discovered that one cleared the spikes by several feet, and continued to make a spring-board of the wall. Our diving expert was a local French officer of Corsican origin who astonished us with his feats, and even taught me to take a back somersault into the water without too painful a smack between the shoulder-blades.

The talking was done under the walnut-tree, and was diversified

at all hours of the day by visits from local 'notables', English and French officers from neighbouring units, hopeful vegetable-growers who wanted to secure a contract for supplying the squadron with cabbages or tomatoes, Kurdish *Aghas*—squires as we might call them—nondescripts with long tales about smuggling, espionage or the imaginary damage done to their crops by the soldiery, and regional officials of the O.C.P. The full title of the O.C.P., *Office des Céréales Panifiables*, is surely a triumph of misdirected pedantry. It has not even the merit of accuracy, for O.C.P. deals with horse-fodder and other unmakeable-into-bread cereals. It has perhaps saved the towns of Syria and the Lebanon from some such horror of starvation as killed many thousands in the last war. But, in the country, its minor muddles, inefficiencies and even tyrannies were naturally the more frequent subject of discussion. The *Aghas*, who unfortunately came to the camp in seedy European suitings and a tarboosh, in place of the flowing robes one might have hoped for, had generally some new grievance or joke against its local representatives. And one felt that many of them would not have minded in the least if all the townsfolk in Syria should starve painfully to death.

The visitors generally departed soon after dinner and left the two of us talking together. Sunset turned the sky into any colour between lemon-yellow and sealing-wax red, before it dimmed into the turquoise of early night and left the mountains of Turkey, rising out of scarves of white mist, as mere black teeth biting the northern heavens. I need not say that much of the talk was about history, and a good deal about poetry, and on neither theme was it by any means a one-sided affair. We were in an area which had seen some of the heaviest fighting of the Crusades: the Crusades—ships and siege engines apart—were decided more exclusively by cavalry action than any other campaigns in the world's history: and there are certain things about horses, as well as about the men who ride them, which have not changed in the least in 800 years.

We also happened to be encamped near the birthplace of a certain twelfth-century lady of note, whose splendid name, Orgueilleuse de Hareng, had cropped up in my reading and rather tickled my fancy. It appealed even more to the major, who was ten years my junior, unmarried, and of a romantic temperament. We arranged for him love-affairs with the Lady Orgueilleuse, their complete respectability guaranteed by the dividing lapse of centuries. I dashed off a series of caricatures of the lady O. in several (equally respectable) situations,

such as breakfasting on pickled herring with the officers of the D.G.B.O.D.D.—Duke Godfrey de Bouillon's Own Damascus Dragoons. The major contributed a longish poem to her in which occasional ribaldries contended with real feeling and a moving sense of the mystery of Time.

I could not remember where I had read her name, or give him any historical account of the actual, long-dead lady. I remember guessing she was a bit of a baggage, which, in her time and circumstances meant not only ruining a man's life, but bringing destruction upon whole countrysides. I even remember quoting that lovely speech put into the mouth of a lady who caused such ravages through no fault of her own, by the most poetic of all modern dramatists:

Stand a little back now with the squabbling of fools, when I am broken up with misery. I see the flames of Emain-Macha going upward in the night, and because of me there'll be weasels and wildcats crying on a lonely wall, where there were Queens, and armies, and red gold.

I was slandering both *Deirdre of the Sorrows* and (as my historical reading now shows me) the Lady Orgueilleuse. I have discovered that she was a perfectly good wife to a prince of Antioch (just behind the hill from where we sat and looked northwards through the twilight). He repudiated her in favour of a mistress who proved a really disastrous baggage, and was later found to be a paid agent of the Saracens. The thirteenth century had Security problems as dangerous and as delicate as our own.

But it was not only security nor only the thirteenth century we discussed as the turquoise sky lost its translucence and the swift night fell. I remember one poetic contest, arising from political arguments, on a theme that would need some such prosy Wordsworthian subtitle as *Lines on The Insanitary Conditions of Villages in the District of X*. I even remember egotistically, some scrap of my own contribution, when the answering *Tenson* of my fellow troubadour has vanished from my memory:

Here we stand,  
In the 'Promised' land,  
And all your promises broken:  
Our children's eyes  
Black pools of fire  
And your healing word unspoken!

But it was a difficult metre, and we did not keep it up for long.

There was, too, as with most men of the major's kind, endless gossip about the careers, fortunes, marriages and deaths of friends, and aunts, brothers and grandfathers of friends. There were plans for what we hoped to do after the war, plans for riding together to my home in Oxfordshire. I had a home, and he had none. I spoke of our arriving like Macaulay's 'Two strange horsemen' at Lake Regillus, and answering a passer-by who knew us not, with some such words as he puts into their mouths in answer to Aulus.

“By many names men called us,  
Through many lands we've passed  
First Alexandria knew us,  
Aleppo knew us last.  
M. My men on Syrian hillsides  
Have drilled for hours and hours  
J. Far over Cairo's thousand trams,  
My *pension* window glowers.  
Both. But to a Chiltern orchard  
We ride, no more to roam  
J. Turn to the right where the blossom's white  
And welcome to my home!”

So we rhymed and laughed and remembered and hoped, till our only hurricane lamp guttered out and it was too late to rouse a servant for more oil. We were certainly tired enough, and glad to grope through velvet darkness to our beds.\*

\* Macaulay's original runs:

“By many names men call us,  
In many lands we dwell.  
Well Samothracia knows us,  
Cyrene knows us well.  
Our house in gay Tarentum  
Is decked each day with flowers  
Far over Byrsa's thousand masts  
Our marble portal towers  
But by the proud Euxotas  
Is our dear native home  
And for the right we come to fight  
Before the ranks of Rome!”

In defiance of the facts of my case, I nearly took over 'Cyrene' whose three sonorous syllables make my (more accurate) 'Aleppo' sound thin and *staccato*. But it is useless to contend with Macaulay on his peculiar field of genius—the poetic use of place names. It reaches its highest peak in that unfinished pageant of English Geography, *The Armada*. But if anyone is inclined to say that Macaulay has no other strings of genius to his harp, let him read the *Epitaph on a Jacobite*, and then hold his peace.

## II. YEOMAN SERVICE

I SPENT the second night of my week's leave in very different, though equally delightful, company. The Captain, second in command of the Major's squadron, rode me off to the convenient quarters he had made for his own men in a complete, though roofless, Roman town. It was a small one, built at some uncertain date, possibly as late as the fifth century, so that 'Byzantine' would perhaps be a better word than 'Roman'.

It was far from unique, except in providing such appropriate accommodation, stables, wash-houses, meeting rooms and all, for the officers, men, horses and dogs of a half-squadron of modern cavalry. There are literally hundreds of such forgotten cities, *Les Villes Mortes de la Haute Syrie*, as the French professors call them, and they raise a thorny problem in archæology. The question that most puzzled me was how this remote and rocky hill country, now giving subsistence to a few miserable villages, could ever have supported so large a population as those cities imply. The Captain—something of a farmer—suggested vineyards and an organized wine-trade. I also thought it possible that the district was less remote in Roman times than in our own, and that an important road system may then have attracted a stream of commercial wealth through hill country which has now become a mere backwater of civilization. There is also the chance that the climate may have altered in 1500 years (as it certainly has in Southern Palestine) and made barren what was once fertile soil. I do not know enough of vine-growing, economic history or meteorology, to give a useful guess on the subject. Perhaps the dead cities were once *Colonia*, settlements for ex-soldiers and N.C.O.s, who lived largely on pensions from a provident Government, a government which wanted the district garrisoned by resident veterans and their wives, productive of a yearly crop of new recruits.

It is perhaps a sign of approaching decay when Governments have to take such steps, and, while providing bread and circuses for their townsfolk, must finance artificial schemes for repopulating the countryside that had once yielded sufficient men, as well as sufficient food, by natural fertility and the natural initiative of individuals.

I only know that the cities are there, by their fifties and hundreds, as like each other as so many peas, each with its Christian *Basilica*,

its *forum*, its Residency or Customs house or whatever it is (a minor mystery) just outside the town, and its innumerable semi-subterranean tombs, carved with shilling-a-yard frieze which looks as if it had all been turned out on a machine. Such were too often the products of the Roman industrial system, based on slave labour and bearing strange resemblance to the machine-made wares in our own shops.

The little towns seem to date from much the same period as the buildings that cluster not very far away, round the broken stump of the great pillar on which St. Simeon Stylites did his long endurance test. To my inexperienced eyes, they looked as if they had been unroofed by earthquake rather than by time or war. But I know that one of them provided me with very comfortable quarters for the night.

My host, as horsemen go, was of very different type and temperament from the Major's. He came from a family of Yorkshire yeoman farmers. He quickly made me pocket an occasional prejudice I entertain against North Country men. It is largely the product of my ignorance: I know far less of Yorkshire than I do of Scotland. I often tell myself that, as a good Royalist, I ought to remember that King Charles found his most loyal support in the North Country—until all that I most dislike in the Scots, temporarily dominant over all that I most admire, sent an army to join Oliver's at York and conquer from the King his best recruiting ground by beating Rupert at Marston Moor.

My Yeomanry Captain was less interested in history than the Major. His small library, ensconced in the curved niche where some Byzantine lady had probably kept cosmetics, was mainly modern. But again, we talked too hard and too interestingly to feel any need of books.

We were up at dawn next day and riding out. I was pleased to find that though a little sore in the tail-piece I was not at all stiff after longish hours in the saddle the day before (after longish months on office stools). We made for another of the ruined cities, camera at saddle-bow. The Captain talked even better on horseback than he had by lamplight, telling me of his pre-war life (largely in offices) and of the little farm that a windfall had enabled him to buy. Through his rock-like practicability and common sense, ran one vein of pure romantic gold: he was intensely interested in the ruined cities, never tired of photographing them on his morning rides or speculating about them through his many lonely hours. Most earnestly he strove

to picture and make alive to himself the folk who built them, the Roman yeomen (if I may be allowed the jingle) who dwelt and dug and married and bred children around their walls, and left such multitudinous relics to puzzle after ages.

In his company, as in the Major's, I began to wonder whether anyone in Beirut (more especially myself) could genuinely be called alive, and whether our office wheels were grinding out real corn or only providing a treadmill to keep Intelligence Officers out of mischief. And there was another, more humiliating reflection. Considering that *we* were supposed to be the brain-workers, even accepting extra pay for it, I found it extremely odd to hear my two friends, after a shorter residence in the East than my own, order, chide, encourage, chat with and even give short lectures to their men in a workaday Arabic which left my more academic fumbblings in another and far lower street.

I had one small lesson in Arabic which I have managed to retain in my sieve-like mind. I was told that the troopers soon chose a nickname for each new officer who arrived in camp. Enquiries addressed to an N.C.O. revealed that I had been dubbed with the rather dull one of *Abu Naddarat*, 'Father of Spectacles'. Hoping for something more picturesque, I said I wished it had been 'Father of Owls'. I was less eager when told that this would entail my being called—according to the modern system of transliteration—*Abu Bum*.

The little incident gave me a curious flash of insight into the difference between the nursery and adult traditions of different races. An N.C.O. approached me later, with pained dignity, and asked if I had really thought his men could be so discourteous as to associate the name of a guest with that of such an unclean and ill-omened creature as an owl.

### III. BEASTS

I STARTED to describe my second leave from Beirut as though I were going to talk about horses. I do not know enough about them to do so without arousing ire or mirth in the expert, and, to all except the expert, horses, unless described by a pen of genius, are as boring to read about as they are interesting to care for, and exhilarating to ride.



Under friendly but firm tuition, I improved my riding considerably during the week. I asked a great many questions about the breeds, ailments and diet of horses, understood some of the answers, and quickly forgot them all. I have certainly forgotten my first rudimentary lesson in the difficult art of telling a horse's age from his teeth. It is one that involves a more general problem, upon which I have often speculated without getting to any conclusion.

You can often go a little astray, occasionally a long way, in guessing the ages of men and women from their outward appearance. But with most animals you cannot even begin to guess. Once a kitten has reached cathood, he seldom shows any sign of his years, until he is approaching death. I believe swans can live 300 years, but I will wager I could not tell a swan on his third birthday from one on his 300th. Some dogs show a few signs of old age, growing blowzy, blear-eyed and even grey-haired in their last few years. But this may be one of the many bad habits they have picked up in their age-long association with Man. And even the most senile dog seldom carries it so far as to need skin lotions, false teeth or a wig. Why is man the only animal to age so visibly?

I did not let such problems, or any others, be a worry to me during my days in camp. Nor did it matter to me that the few superficial items of horsemastership which I acquired were so rapidly forgotten. What mattered was that I had recently been half-dead to most of the interesting things in the world, and was now fully alive. My only problem, and I gave it little thought, was how to remain alive when my week was finished, and duty demanded my return to Beirut. Meanwhile I was absurdly happy and seemed to be a source of happiness to others. News from my moribund town, pedantries from fossilized libraries, seemed to have an enlivening effect on my more isolated companions. If they gave me plenty to laugh at, I could sometimes return the compliment with what had become mere chestnuts in the office. For while the moods of any single person are complex, the interaction of one such person upon another beggars the intricacies of the solar system.

I have said that the Major's ideas were often unexpected. One of his opinions on literature seems worthy of record.

We were discussing the collaborationists, the vermin who have been earmarked for eradication when France has been cleared of Germans. I said that I regretted to see on the list the name of Marcel Pagnol, author of two excellent plays, *Marius* and *Topaze*. The





*Drawn by George Jones*

*An Unexpected Arrival! The Lady OF THE JELLYEUSE DE HARLING comes  
to a Meet of Foxhounds at the camp of 'our & tuthors' 'Can dry' Companions.*

LIFE IN SYRIA

*With apologies to LIFE IN LONDON  
as illustrated by George Cruikshank (1792-1878)*

talk naturally wandered on to P. G. Wodehouse, and the broadcasts by which he had purchased comforts and luxuries from his captors. I said that I was not surprised to hear of his ignoble surrender because, though amused by some of his work, I had seemed to detect in it . . . here I broke off to see a look of something like horror on my friend's face. He was silent a moment, and then said he simply could not believe that I had ever, for one instant, been genuinely charmed by the cheap, sordid and unreal substitute for comedy with which Wodehouse had made his undeserved reputation. And when I came to think it over, I realized that the Major knew what he was talking about, and could see right through the self-deceptions of the inverted highbrow.

Literature was far from being our only topic. What is left of the world's cavalry still naturally maintains its affectionate connection with country things. I know that this can sometimes stir the resentment of townsmen whose cities, without the fruits of country labour, would within a week be mere cauldrons of starvation and riot. My two friends were perhaps too humble of heart to feel any counter-resentment. But they were good witnesses to the old tradition. The military movements of their squadron (unless its allotment of transport was unusually high) must have been gravely hampered by the number of dogs, hens, rabbits, geese, pigs and sheep which enlivened the camp. There was even talk of a cow or two, to supply the men with fresh and cheap milk. Cavalry must travel by the aid of lorries nowadays, if only for the sake of the bulging equipment which modern warfare demands. There can hardly be room for much of the livestock in them. Since, even in the twentieth century, pigs are still unprovided with wings, and neither hens nor ducks can use theirs to keep pace with horses and lorries, these lesser breeds without the law must presumably follow the main body, on short marches, at a walk, hop, skip or waddle: no doubt a rear-party, the inevitable and long-suffering "N.C.O. and three men", is detailed to bring along the menagerie. But when next the squadron is ordered on a long move, across frontiers, I fear it will be a question of selling up the fat stock to local *Aghas*, only too willing to get them at reduced prices, and making hay of the messing account.

If modern mounted units can use lorries and roads for their movement, the main stretches of the country seemed hardly a horseman's paradise, since it largely consists of hills covered with pebbles and shale, above which rise boulders and outcrops of the underlying rock.

I used to wonder why the Crusaders (and for that matter the Byzantines before, and the Mamelukes after them) won or lost their campaigns so largely by cavalry manœuvre. I did not get any good light on the problem until six months later, when I happened to be working at Aleppo and slipped away to spend Christmas with my cavalry friends in their winter camp. The other guests were about half a dozen officers, among whom an almost forgotten English tradition had continued to linger into the nineteen-forties. I do not think it was the tradition of the Crusaders nor even of Rupert's cavaliers, but rather that of the 'Corinthians' of the early nineteenth century, who did so much to enliven society with their originalities and horseplay before Queen Victoria succeeded in making it dull again.

We started to eat, drink and make merry about 7 o'clock in the evening. The toughest of us were, I believe, still going strong between 3 and 4 a.m., but we were all up at 6. Dawn was zero hour for a fox-hunt: we jumped on our horses and pointed their heads, hallooing, for the hills.

There was no sign or whiff of a fox. There were no fox-hounds, and the pack consisted of mixed greyhounds, poodles, fox-terriers, two Salukis and a Great Dane. The fun did not consist in the purely imaginary pursuit, but in the steeplechasing and mountaineering. We went up rocky gorges and steep cliffs at a speed which would have seemed to me dangerous on smooth turf. The pace eventually grew too hot for the local officers and Arab N.C.O.s, who dismounted and led their horses up the final precipice. They found us eventually on the peak where we had halted, men and mounts in a disgraceful lather. I had had no conception that a horse could climb as mine had done, and certainly no idea that I could sit in a saddle while he did so. Needless to say, I had done nothing but sit; all the skill and courage were his. I gave him his head, and remained little more than a passenger while he scrambled and galloped abreast of his stable rivals.

We were soon plunging down in a somewhat more perilous descent. I was far too exhilarated to be frightened, as common sense dictated. I can only remember a distinct feeling of relief, welling up into my conscious mind, as we reined up and trotted sedately back into camp, with several quite imaginary foxes hunted to death, but no horse or rider maimed.

I had come from, and had to return to, some rather depressing

work in a cold, dank town. But I had had my Christmas treat, and a glorious morning in the sunshine. I shall not soon forget what happened before breakfast on Boxing Day 1943.

#### IV. CROSS-PURPOSES

THOSE who regret that men of our nation practise fox-hunting (as I do myself, though in most hesitating fashion) will perhaps find matter to feed their wrath in what I am writing. I hope they will also be honest enough to acknowledge that they find matter for surprise. Some witty but indiscriminating person, who ought to have known better, once described the English fox-hunting squire as 'the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable'. He spoke, I think, from a prejudiced knowledge of a limited type. His modern successors in contempt seem to me to speak (and write) from complete ignorance. I have frequently heard the word 'intolerant' applied to the hunters. I am quite sure that I have had personal experience of far more rancorous intolerance among their opponents. The more fanatical denouncers of 'blood sports' frequently have recourse to the word 'unchristian', though they would have very great difficulty in finding any passage in the Gospels to justify their use of the word. On the other hand, if they are at all acquainted with the documents in question, they would have no difficulty at all in finding a passage which advises us to avoid judging lest we be judged.

If I am to appear momentarily as Counsel in the immemorial lawsuit between Town and Country, I must speak as a recently converted countryman, and no doubt ignorantly.

It has always been a puzzle to me that the R.S.P.C.A. secured Royal patronage so early, while the body which serves to protect children from brutality has remained so long without an R to its name. But ignorance prevents me from knowing how much truth I am hearing when my country neighbours tell me that in some districts the zeal of R.S.P.C.A. inspectors is making certain perfectly humane forms of farming practically impossible for all except the very rich. But I would not like to feel intolerant towards the poor townsfolk from whom they draw their subscriptions, least of all towards the old ladies whose acquaintance with animals is confined to the one cat which laps up their milk, looks at them with scarcely-veiled disdain, and then stalks out to a bit of real life on the tiles.

I remember hearing of a spectator who sat unmoved through a documentary film on the Spanish Civil War, filled with glimpses of ruined homes and shattered corpses, but made no comment until the screen showed the picture of a peaceful village street down which an ordinary man was riding an ordinary donkey. This made her burst out sobbing, 'Oh, the poor little animal!' I remember, too, the impish pleasure I once felt and the dismay I caused in a garden city where I was reluctantly residing, by suggesting to the authorities that a 'Kindness to Animals' week they had planned could conveniently be made to coincide with National Rat Week.

I can think of few things more detestable than a conscious delight in inflicting unnecessary pain on animals for its own sake. It is a thing commoner perhaps in slums than in villages. But it is just blank ignorance and stupidity to impute this horror to the people who shoot and hunt animals (thereby giving birds and foxes a somewhat less painful death than Nature would inflict, by old age, decrepitude and consequent starvation). They certainly love and are loved by animals in a way no townsman would ever begin to comprehend.

One can hardly exaggerate the abysses of misunderstanding that divide the opponents in this controversy. A fox-hunting friend of mine once printed and discreetly disseminated some cards announcing the Meet of a wholly imaginary Cat hunt in Mayfair. So many idiots fell into the trap as to fill Shepherd's Market with an indignant protest meeting, which naturally found nothing against which to protest. They could not even take warning that their legs were being pulled from the name of the M.F.H. which my friend had had printed on the card. It read "His Excellency the Marquis de Sade". The saddening thing is that such gullible fanatics have almost a monopoly of the public's ear.

I must return to my theme, the delightful holiday that two of my friends gave me a year and more ago. I do not think it unduly prejudiced my judgment of them and their type or clouded my powers of discretion. I saw that their horses were well cared for and I have reason to think their men were. The proof of that pudding is in the request for a second helping. When the troopers and N.C.O.s came to the end of their short periods of service, a very satisfying proportion of them signed on for a second or a third. I saw, meanwhile, that the presence of their unit in that distant countryside was conferring a number of benefits, medical, financial, social and educa-

tive, on the rich and poor of its queerly mixed population. I think my friends will be regretted when war or peace moves them and their animals elsewhere.

## V. CAVALIERS

THERE was a story current before the last war of a young lieutenant of Lancers who was asked, in a *viva-voce* examination, what was the function of cavalry in modern war. He replied that the function of cavalry was to add Tone to what would otherwise be a vulgar brawl. The form of fighting for which my friends were originally trained has now become obsolete among civilized nations (except where Russia's vast forests impede the movement of tanks). When peace follows and, as always, apes the social structure of war, horsemen will presumably be elbowed into positions of even smaller influence than after the last war. A new generation will arise which only knows what it is to be ruled by mechanical specialists and by the rather mean type of bureaucrat that can exploit and batten on their work. I am sure the world will not be spiritually the richer for the change of allegiance and I see no reason whatever to think it will be happier.

One must accept what Time decrees. I fear that the transference of aristocracy from horsemen to mechanics is already written in the Book of Doom. It may have begun ages ago, with crimes and deficiencies among the sometimes thoughtless riders who were splendid in battle but slothful or tyrannous in peace. With all its faults I still find their type and breed a more lovable one than that of the politicians and financiers who now govern us. Their sins have been well and truly punished by the growth of the machinery they hated and the devastation of the countrysides they loved.

Some trace the decline of their power from the days when half of them embarked on a rebellion that was destined (to their own horror) to end in regicide—and the other half showed themselves too quarrelsome and too impatient of discipline to fight their better-financed fellows. The fox-hunting squires who rode King Charles to a kill, with lawyers and rich merchants to pay the hunt subscription, probably imagined that they were consolidating for all time their arbitrary power over the poor, with which the King and his government had certainly been tampering. But the mills of God,



grinding slowly but exceeding small, ground out in the end the ungoverned horror of the industrial revolution, and the final victory of mill-owner over squire, town over country.

I have already mentioned the curious exiguousness of popular and local tradition on that great Civil War which finally decided that modern England was to be evolved without any monarchical check on the tyranny of the rich—indeed with the monarchy put into the rich man's pocket and only produced occasionally as a brightly-coloured toy to bemuse the tired eyes of the poor. Study of contemporary sources shows that the majority of the poor were wishful for a Royalist victory. The poor generally know dimly on which side their bread is buttered, even in those complicated political problems which we like to think are above their heads.

There is an even stranger gap in our printed literature. Few of our good books or poems deal with that decisive turn in our history, and those few seem to swing between the alternate extremes of Whiggery and fumed-oak sentimentalism. It almost looks as if the gentlemen of England, arbiters of our literature, felt that the great Rebellion was something to be ashamed of.

But since it is time to call to heel this wandering chapter on horsemen, I may perhaps be allowed to finish it with a poem I once wrote in the hope of rivalling Macaulay's fine galloping propaganda about Naseby Fight.

Syria is a fine country, but in the midst of its most impressive mountains one sometimes turns homesick, and wishes one were wandering over the close-cropped turf of our English downs. Will you imagine that you are doing so? Will you picture yourself coming upon a long, low mound, such as you can see at Roundway above Devizes, where the grass grows pathetically thicker and taller than on the surrounding slope. You happen to have a guide-book with you, you pull it from your pocket and find something about 'a dyke on the E. side of the hill, marking the grave of 20 Royalists killed in a skirmish with the London Train Bands in June 1643'. Now you can read the poem.

## CAVALRY CHARGE

Red streak of rust where they buried our swords with us,  
Wet-rot and mould where the leather was thrown.  
Hot was its smell when the sun struck our saddle bows:  
Now the cold darkness has closed on its own.

Why did we wheel from the lane we were following,  
Charge for that innocent smudge on the hill,  
Yelling like fools when its bristles rose menacing—  
Muskets to blast us and pike-heads to kill?

Rows of young 'prentices scared at our galloping.  
Round with your muskets, the bird's on the wing!  
Steel caps sit ill on your London-bred faces.  
'Way for your betters, make way for your king!

. . . Thunder of hell and the mare spitted under me,  
Screaming for death in a cause not her own.  
Blood in my eyes as the life dribbles out of me,  
Blackened and seared where the powder has blown.

Curse on the babblers who sent you to slaughter us  
(Groans of the poor where their lackeys have trod),  
Lawyer and teacher and preacher and shopkeeper—  
God save us all from the servants of God!

Live and be damned to the Freedom you sweated for,  
Build up the hells that your masters decree.  
Our work is finished, our home is awaiting us.  
We are the fortunate. We are the free.

## CHAPTER SIX

# TROUGH

"Gored mine own thought, sold cheap what is most dear . . ."  
SHAKESPEARE, Sonnet cx.

### I. FANDANTTI

RETURN to Beirut was rather like return, in Mr. T. S. Eliot's phrase, from 'living' to 'half-living'. Yet, after two holidays only three months apart (my Palestinian tramp and my Syrian cavalcade) I could not remain quite such a clod as I fear I had been throughout the first winter.

I was most alive in the early mornings, which generally began with a bicycle ride in one of two directions; and often there was amusement on the way.

Near Miss Somerville's house in the *Rue Jeanne d'Arc* there was a little, almost rural, lane between cultivated vegetable plots in which I had once seen a citizen of Beirut ploughing at midday in his pyjamas. He used the same old wooden type of plough that his ancestors had made, I imagine, in Biblical times. They have the advantage of being portable—they are brought home at evening, laid like a scythe, on the shoulder—and of accommodating almost any animal or pair of animals for draught. I have seen one drawn by a very large camel and a very small donkey. This lane ended in a small mosque, looking for all the world like an English Nonconformist chapel to which a little minaret had been most inappropriately tacked. On the gallery of this minaret a man used to announce that only God was God and Muhammad His prophet, in one of the most far-carrying and melodious voices I have ever heard. And he did so daily about half an hour before the sun rose.

During my first months at Beirut, I had slept soundly while he made his announcements. But as spring followed winter, I was generally awake to listen and enjoy. By midsummer he had become my alarm clock and I was getting up in the twilight to don riding kit and bicycle in it—most cramped round the knees—to the place on the Damascus Road where horses were astrir. Alternatively I

coasted down steeper hills and in lighter attire, to the French Officers' Club by the waterside.

I did not climb the stairs to its locked library or the huge, unused reception room where balconies gave out on to the Bay of St. George. I did not even enter or expect to meet a friend on the ground floor, with its empty bottles and stale depressing smells of last night's dinner. I trundled my bicycle round the corner of the building, and descended a few steps to the little gymnasium in the basement. I had there grand opportunity to pick up and follow a thread which has run right through my life, ever since the early schooldays when a diminutive and most courtly sergeant-major (retired from long service in H.M. Army) first taught me the difference between the parries of *quarte* and *tierce*.

I was rusty enough when I came to Beirut, having been too lazy to seek out the fencing school in Cairo. My foils were rusty too, and bent with having been long curled to fit my tin trunk. But my hand was soon rejoicing in the feel of them, and re-learning a little of its former skill. Fencing had been a great stand-by on the long voyage out to the East. One can always fence at sea, if the deck is not heaving at too steep an angle, and one takes up less room than the tennis-players and quoiteers. At the insistence of a Herculean Polish *aide-de-camp* (who acted as judge for our contests, but nearly always evaded any fencing himself) we used to stand up to each other stripped to the waist in the equatorial sun. It is a good system for learning the defensive tactics which so many neglect, in their eagerness to hit the other man. To be hit is to be hurt a bit, and one grows wary in parrying thrusts. I do not think it is dangerous. In twenty-five years I have only seen one small accident when (as very rarely happens) a foil-blade snapped near the button: and then it left so sharply jagged an end as to penetrate a fencing jacket and make a small wound in the crook of a man's arm. I need hardly add that, though I may be a fool, I am not a lunatic. Except on the stage, I have never courted blindness or death by standing up to any opponent without a mask.

No nudity or other unorthodoxies were permitted at Beirut. My fencing master was a Corsican, an *adjutant* (which in French means warrant-officer, rather than the commissioned factotum of a regiment or battery). He was mild, cautious and law-abiding. I used sometimes to wonder whether he would not have filled his fencing school and made it a greater feature of Beirut life by a little more flamboyance

and *panache*—even if he had thereby drawn a vendetta or two upon his head. But then I am a pupil of Gravé, with occasional doses of Bertrand, and I like being shouted at.

Gravé had what was for me the great virtue of knowing the history of his trade and its former practitioners, from the oddly named 'Marx Brothers' who taught what literally can be called the hack-work of the fifteenth century to the periwigged Italians who laid the foundations of modern subtlety and precision. I once read through every book in the British Museum (no long task) published in English, French or Latin on the subject of swordsmanship between 1580 and 1800, and I had Gravé to give me practical advice on unravelling their pedantries. My object was partly historical, partly theatrical, and I had his sympathy and co-operation on both counts. Gravé knew a good stage fight when he saw one (which is about once in ten years in London) and even then he could generally have improved on it.

He had one of the ugliest and scratchiest voices I have ever heard, but what I remember most vividly was one of his silences. I was co-operating with him, as sparring-partner, in a very long and complicated rapier and dagger fight for a rubbishy modern play about Queen Elizabeth. He was so far successful as to make one London critic write that "the fight alone was worth the price of a stall", but his success was achieved by the only method possible. He did not let the actors go through three weeks of rehearsal saying daily, "This is where we fight. We'll rehearse that later", and leave it till the dress rehearsal to fudge up something which can have no dramatic effect and must almost inevitably end in someone being injured. Fights generally occur at a moment when the plot of the play and the characterization are at their tensest, and that tension will collapse into boredom if two clumsy actors allow themselves to begin belabouring the air with the obvious intention of not getting hurt themselves rather than of trying to kill each other. Gravé's pupils rehearsed half an hour daily for a month, and by the first night they had not only mastered the unimportant technicalities of period and style, but were also illustrating plot and character more forcibly than they could do by speaking their lines.

With rapier and dagger, he could also add some of the beauty of movement—comparable to the grace of a pavane or minuet—which the modern stage so sadly lacks. He was getting down to it properly in his fencing school when in walked the American authoress of the

Elizabethan play, a very young and attractive girl with a somewhat exaggerated notion of her own knowledge and talents. She interrupted proceedings by embarking on a long and inaccurate lecture on the history of fencing. Gravé stood dumb, fixing her with a blue and fishlike eye. Her spate of erudition began to falter, and after some minutes to peter out. She found grace to say, "Maybe you know more about all this than I do!" Gravé still stood silent and motionless as a rock. The poor girl made a backward exit from the room, barely covered by some apologetic half-sentence. There was a long pause and then Gravé broke silence with the somewhat unexpected comment in his slow, harsh English: "I vundaire," he said, wiping his bald head, "I vundaire vot part of America she comes from. I should zink it vos vun of ze *wild* parts."

There had been a fascination for me (as I sat in the Museum or capered round Gravé's Salon) in the quaint terminology of the older craft—the *tondo* which circles round your own head, the *fandante* which should split your opponent's from forehead to chin, or the *squalambraccio* which aims at hamstringing his left knee, always the most vulnerable point of attack. But if the heavy weapons restrict one's movements to the same slow dignity as those of a dancer in a farthingale, they also demand the same wide spaces for manoeuvre. And if anyone, after reading my present remarks, feels inclined to write to me for advice about a Shakespearean duel, I must warn him that little can be done except on a stage twenty times larger than the little strip on which modern fencers can contend.

Though Beirut was full of officers, my Corsican *adjutant* could never find one to help him give a demonstration at the *Fêtes Sportives* which were held in the town and the garrisoned villages above it. I had to accompany him and appear as the sole Englishman on a stage mainly occupied by Arab-speaking boxers and wrestlers from Syria and the Lebanon. Luckily I have long forgotten what stage-fright means and grown accustomed to such experiences. I can even remember with pride when I stood up as Aunt Sally to a Japanese fencing-master before an audience of the Japan society of London. I knew little except the formal rules of his queer game, but reached him with one cut under the ribs that raised a sudden look of surprise on the impassive face behind the bamboo mask. Still, I would not like to try to emulate the actors of his race who disdain to work with bamboo, or even blunted steel. I have seen two execute a sword dance which begins with both entering wiggled like Sudanese Fuzzi-

Wuzzis, and ends with a stage strewn with hair or wool sheared from their heads by great sweeps of their razor-edged swords.

Of the other exercise to which the Muezzin called me before dawn, I have already said a little. I must not tell what unit it was, encamped beside the Damascus Road, which enabled me to dismount from a bicycle, lean it against the water-trough, and jump on a horse. It provided me not only with something to ride on, but also with good company in which to ride. One of my horseback companions was a middle-aged Pole who had spent two years in Russian prisons and had now come to Syria to practise his former profession of Vet, and learn a little English, particularly horseman's English.

He was the most cheerful and friendly comrade on my morning rides, and very tolerant of my blundering attempts to increase his English vocabulary. I remember riding with him down the avenue outside General Catroux's Residency (where Druse or Circassian sentries lounged about in impossibly musical-comedy uniforms) and ducking to avoid the low boughs of the trees. I began to explain to him the English idiom about 'getting Absalomed' and derive it from the unfortunate gentleman in the Bible whose long hair suddenly converted him from horseman to gallows-bird. My Polish friend answered, "I tink I not use dat word much, for myself"—and I turned to see a smile on his face and to remember that above it he was as bald as an egg.

## II. DE PROFUNDIS

I SAID in the Prelude that there were certain private matters which I was not prepared to discuss in print, and I have no intention of recanting. But there are others, equally personal and intimate, which must be mentioned, if I am to make the next part of my story intelligible. They have grown to be one of the governing factors of my life, and I cannot continue without some attempt to describe them.

I say 'attempt to describe' because I despair of successfully conveying, to a reader who has not had similar experiences, anything but the most remote hint of what I would most like to make clear. I even despair of convincing such a person that I am trying to tell the truth, rather than wallowing in a slough of self-pity.

Let me be emphatic on one point. Every man's story is unique,

and if mine seems to present some unusual features, it is not for me to say that it has entailed a greater load of suffering. So far as I can guess what is going on behind the cheerful and inscrutable faces that one meets every day, the majority of men and women may constantly be feeling, and more unbearably than I, the same—

‘Desperate tides of the whole round world’s anguish,  
Forced through the channels of a single heart.’

I write not in self-pity but in the hope of bringing help to others less articulate than myself, who may have had similar difficulties to face. I also write in full remembrance of that best of Arabic proverbs:

‘I had no shoes and I grumbled. Then  
I met a man who had no feet.’

I can recognize in the literature of the past, the attempts of a long-dead writer to describe experiences astonishingly like my own. They were, if I may be allowed the paradox, resoundingly successful in their failure. They spiritually illumined, and yet technically disfigured, a series of queer plays which, while far above all hope of rivalry, are certainly not above criticism. All contain scenes and passages which no human genius has yet been able to match. Practically all contain childish clumsinesses upon which the veriest beginners in literary craftsmanship could improve. It could be done, if in no other way, by the method that the author’s friend, Ben Jonson, suggested, by a liberal use of the blue pencil.

This is partially true of all Shakespeare’s plays. Even *Hamlet* (to take a hackneyed instance) would be a better play if it were not marred, at its final crisis, by the unconvincing device which adds Queen Gertrude’s corpse to the already over-crowded slaughter-heap on the fencing floor. But it is more undeniably true of the strange group of plays that seem to have been written or re-written shortly after *Hamlet* and (so far as we can discover the chronology) round about the author’s fortieth year. I would cite first that broken-backed masterpiece, *Measure for Measure*, possibly *All’s Well that Ends Well*, and certainly *Timon of Athens*, which has not even a back to break. I would include that repellent but fascinating exercise in ‘debunking’, *Troilus and Cressida*. But I will refrain from trying to read my ideas into *Othello*, which exhibits less flaws than any, or even into the obviously imperfect *Macbeth*. To do so would merely be to



excite barren dispute. And I will certainly not risk a foot near an emotional earthquake of the dimensions of *King Lear*.

I once won an Oxford University Scholarship (and a much-needed seventy pounds) by reading up all there is to be read about the private life of William Shakspeare the actor. I toiled up the huge mountains of conjecture, and patiently hunted down the few small mice of fact. Leaving his plays and his genius entirely out of the question, I can remember nothing whatever in his life, circumstances, or probable character that remotely reminds me of my own, except for the accident of ten years' employment in the theatre. All the implications seem to show that he was an utterly different type of man from myself, and one which I find somewhat uncongenial. And yet when I read his sonnets and plays, particularly the ones I have mentioned, I am constantly finding lines and passages in which other people seem most puzzled and astray, but I myself am suddenly and incredibly at home. It is not a pleasant home. It is indeed so tyrannously unpleasant that there is little interest and no comfort in discovering that so illustrious a predecessor once haunted its shadowy and sorrowful corridors.

I may be asked to give chapter and verse, but this is clearly not the place to do so. I will only cite six short and well-known lines from *Measure for Measure*:—

“But man, proud Man,  
Dressed in a little brief authority,  
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,  
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven  
As make the angels weep. . . .”

The insight and majesty of the passage are obvious. It is common property for all to enjoy. But I once used to resent, and still find that most people (scholars included) resent, the intrusion of the unparsable, unnecessary, hardly intelligible fourth line: it seems to break the clear sense and the rhetorical sweep of the whole, and is generally blue-pencilled on the rare occasions when the play is acted. I no longer feel about it as I did. I have had certain experiences which do not enable me to parse or explain or expound, but yet assure me that it flowed from Shakespeare's pen as genuinely and inevitably as any line he ever wrote.

We are all lonely islands, cut off from our fellows in the archipelago (and still more from the mainland) by mists that no effort can pierce. But for the first twenty years of my life, so far as I could descry what was happening elsewhere, I developed along much the same lines, mental and emotional, as everybody else. In particular I felt more cheerful on one day than on another, finding pleasures more enjoyable and difficulties easier to tackle. Such slight exhilarations, with their contrary depressions, were much fostered, the first by effort and environment, by holidays or unusually interesting work, the second by physical illness (of which I had very little) or monotonous conditions. So much, I take it, is normal and universal.

Then suddenly, and apparently for no reason, the whole scene changed. In the course of a few hours it became impossible to enjoy anything, to understand how one had previously enjoyed anything or could ever hope to do so again. All life rearranged itself into a cruel pattern of torment. Material trifles, like telephones or washing lists, became instruments of tragedy or insurmountable barriers to action. My fellow men and women—and myself with them—turned into utterly self-centred beasts of prey, cloaking behind sickening masks of politeness, sentimentality and self-deception, our lust and callousness, our greed and our ultimate despair. No kind of faith, hope or charity had, or could have, any meaning in this world or another. I lay awake at night or got up to march endlessly round empty streets. If I slept, I woke up jaded and unrefreshed in exactly the same mood of hopelessness in which I had lain down. If others were transparently hateful (and I seemed to see with unerring eye to the very bottom of their natures) I thought myself the most contemptible of all. I asked myself, with Hamlet,

“What should such fellows as I do, crawling between Heaven and Earth?”

There seemed to be no refuge but in suicide, and for that I lacked the enterprise. I can remember standing on pavement edges in London streets and feeling a muscular reaction tending to throw me under the wheels of passing traffic. If I refrained from courting death, I longed for some injury that would keep me immobile and free from responsibilities, for the few weeks to which my horizon was limited. I could not understand why I resisted the temptation to feign sickness. I could not understand what there was in me that resisted any temptation, or put up any resistance at all. Not

merely the power to fight, but the reason for fighting, the innermost springs of all courage and resolution, seemed to be cut away from within me, and in their place was an unintelligible blank.

The fit lasted some three weeks. I remember waking up one blessed morning to a completely normal life (again for no discernible reason), and telling myself that no human being could have endured it for much longer. I learned later that I had under-estimated my own powers of endurance and the toughening effect of repeated experiences.

The fits recurred at irregular intervals. They have never quite reached the intensity of the first outbreak, and only twice approached it. They varied greatly in form. At times the governing factor seemed to be a sense of unreality, giving all activities the quality of a nightmare, and making their background, streets or rooms, trees or fields, seem like painted scenery behind which lay a menacing nothingness. At other times the principal sensation was of being divided into two or three personalities, each devising new methods of hampering or tormenting the other. The only quite constant factor was Pain. The mere fact of existence, the mere passage of time, was painful. This pain, so far as I could analyse it, seemed always to spring from an oppressive sense of guilt, so vague that I could not attach it to any particular sin or omission. It seemed somehow to hover round Work, and my failure to pull my weight in the world, or earn any of the luxuries I consumed. It drove me to a morbid fear of spending any money on myself, to cold baths and distasteful exercises, to anything which might thwart or batter down my natural desires. I practised none of these asceticisms to the glory of God (which was completely veiled from me) but in a kind of desperate hope that they might take the edge off the suffering. Each time it seemed impossible that it could entirely pass away.

The morbidity which made me grind my nose into anything that was distasteful, especially into monotonous work, also seemed to prevent me from doing that work properly. The worst attack was on memory, particularly memory for names, faces and street-plans. I could lose my way in the part of London where I was born and brought up: I could meet a man on Tuesday and discuss an important matter with him for an hour or so, meet him again on Thursday and wonder who the devil he was and whether we had met before. And my guilty conscience and lack of self-confidence made me for ever put forward tentative suggestions when I should have issued orders,

for ever consult the supposed convenience and wishes of my subordinates—servants, tradespeople, and stage hands in the theatre—just when they were probably saying to each other in private, “Why can’t the b——y fool tell us what he wants and let us get on with it?”

The most inscrutable mystery about the whole business was that others, friends or colleagues as well as subordinates, did not seem to notice the difficulties under which I was labouring. I naturally donned each day a mask moulded by custom and by memory of what I had done in normal times. But I never ceased to be astonished at its apparent power to deceive intelligent and observant outsiders. At worst they seemed to think me eccentric, depressed or a little off colour. If they guessed at even a quarter of the truth, they gave no sign of it. Custom lessened my astonishment and, as I came to accept the miracle, I also grew cleverer at remoulding the mask and adding to it touches of colour which strengthened the fake impression of normality. One way or another, my outer world went on much as before, while my inner one was oscillating between extremes that were unrecognizably different.

For the fits of depression, and what seemed to me utter incompetence, alternated with periods of perfectly normal life and activity. Each time I seemed to emerge from my prison-house with faculties quite unaffected except, as I sometimes think, with a memory slightly but permanently impaired in certain directions. The emergences into normality, by mere contrast, naturally seemed like entries into Heaven; but there were also short periods when more than contrast was at work, and I was ‘suffering’, as the psychologists would quaintly phrase it, from ‘phases of elation’. These generally preceded, and were quickly swallowed up (‘sublimated’, to use the jargon again) into creative work, either theatrical productions or the writing of some book or play. Meanwhile I seemed myself to have rediscovered the secret of Life itself and found it to be a joyful one. I fell in love with all my fellow-creatures, men, women, children and animals. I longed to share my happiness with them—before it got narrowed and concentrated into creativeness. According to their mood, I had some success in fusing a little more meaning and enthusiasm into their life (pale wraiths of the glory that was temporarily illuminating mine) or else drove them into a puzzled irritation, a desire to mock or (occasionally) into active hostility.

It is perhaps a wise Providence that, for ordinary mortals like me, restricts those moods to a short time and a narrow range. Some

tough and yet superlatively sensitive natures, such as Shelley's, the Chevalier Bayard's, and perhaps Saint Joan's, are enabled to maintain their position on the heights through a lifetime: but one notices that it is generally a short lifetime. Indeed the Greeks may have been thinking of this psychological phenomenon when they coined their proverb, 'Those whom the gods love die young'. Most of us, more everyday creatures, must be content with an occasional day or two or, at most, week or two. If we continue longer on our career of ecstasy we shall soon find that those who must work along more normal lines will think it their duty to lay down nets and booby-traps to slow us down and catch us out. We seem ourselves to be moving in rainbow spheres,—

Where there's no law but Truth, but Truth no gaoler,  
And where no moth corrupts and where no rust is,  
But each man's heart is his own court of Justice.

But the world, plodding along its ancient and well-marked path, must (as poor Joan found) arrange for earthly courts of Justice to sentence the celestial road-hog and for a gaoler to earn a livelihood by keeping them cooped up, until their joyous flight becomes a failing and scarcely intelligible memory. It is, thank God, a memory that can never quite fade away: for I believe it to come from God, and to be ultimately beyond the reach of Time and of human intelligence.\*

### III. EMERGENCE

ONE lives and learns—and suffering is a more effective schoolmaster than happiness. If the fits of depression grew markedly less acute, if I grew warier in knowing how to handle them and conceal them from others, they also tended to lengthen intolerably, until finally I could reckon on three or four months of normal life in the year, eight or nine of misery.

I need hardly say that I early had recourse to Harley Street and to other places where they psychologize. I paid my two guineas here and my three guineas there. I listened to a good deal of pompous and childish nonsense, and received one or two pieces of really sound

\* The verse quotation, here slightly misapplied, comes from the late Humbert Wolfe's beautiful poem, *Reverie of Policeman*, which it was my business and my very great privilege to adapt for stage production.

advice. For Freud was the fashion, and common sense at a discount. I got some help from an old pre-Freudian grandee, but he ended by telling me flatly (when I had become a gunner in the army and had no more guineas to give him) that I was contending with a well-recognized type of maladjustment for which there was no known cause, and no treatment whatever.

For a time I too had listened patiently to the Freudians and worshipped at their strange shrine. But the connection between my troubles and my relations with women, with my parents or with my wife or children, seemed so tenuous and so contradictory, that I soon started questing down other paths. And if fourteen years' experience has taught me nothing else, I have at least learned that the self-abasement which seems to be at the bottom of my difficulties is in some way more closely connected with Work than with Sex and has roots which probably go deeper than either.

Harley Street preached at me, for the most part, the comforting but demonstrably untrue doctrine that the whole thing was right outside my control. Experience was certainly teaching me that I could not gain control by direct attack. The grim resolve to carry on, the setting of the teeth and bracing of the mental muscles, generally made matters worse. I was learning that life most often demands shifts, twists and evasions; "Go round," as the Boig said to Peer Gynt. Faced with a brick wall that one cannot climb, it is better to seek a way round than to feel virtuous while battering oneself to pieces on the bricks. I believe myself to have found that way round, after some thirteen years of useless battering, though I could hardly describe it to myself in words, let alone guide others to it. The solution is, perhaps, too simple to be articulate. But if I did not believe myself to have found it, if I was not at least in sight of a remedy, I would hardly be discussing my disease in public print.

I feel I shall soon be at odds, not only with the Freudians but also with all those scientists who do not know the limits of their own field, but are for ever trying to widen its boundaries and encroach on philosophical and theological ground where they immediately and quite naturally go astray. They have no map of the territory and foolishly despise the pioneers who opened it up, the philosophers and artists and priests who have been patiently exploring it for centuries. I have studied both modern and ancient investigators (I had to, under pressure of pain) and I know which I think the more trustworthy. I believe that the essence of a man is neither fear nor

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desire. I believe him to be more than a mere puppet of his instincts and his environment. I believe his essence to be Will, and Free Will. And I have the common sense and, what is more, the daily practice of the whole human race to back up my belief. You can spin the finest web of argument for 'behaviourism' or pull the longest face about Predestination and our own powerlessness in the face of circumstance and environment. But in order to carry on with daily life and practical affairs, a man must assume that he himself and his neighbours round him are exercising free choice in everything they do. There is no alternative when you come to act upon your conclusions, except a complete *impasse* wherein the mind must halt and turn back. If the implied conclusion were found to be at variance with Science, then one would have one more indication of the clear fact that there are some matters in which the Scientific method must lead in the opposite direction from the Truth. Among such matters are those wherein everyday experience is a more trustworthy guide than Science. No Determinist (however sound his theoretical basis, however numerous his experiments on rats and rabbits) has ever yet ceased to blame himself for mistakes and unkindnesses, or quite abandoned resolving to do better in the teeth of Instinct and Environment. None has yet *lived* Determinism for five consecutive minutes, in the sense that thousands of Christians *live* Christianity all their lives.

I have seen enough of the East (where Circumstance and Environment are more simply referred to as 'The Will of Allah') to know how much sloth and indifference can be cloaked under a seemingly pious acquiescence in Events, a seeming-reverent attitude towards forces that may very well exist only by the will of Satan. East is not West, but I fear that if Determinism ever conquered Europe as predestinarian Islam has conquered this quarter of the globe, the moral and material results of the Gospel of Kismet might be even more terrible than anything one can discern in the slums and palaces of Cairo.

I would like to borrow from the Muslims the one thing I admire about their controversies, the crisp and precise terms which they still use in place of our pseudo-scientific verbiage. I prefer primeval rock to modernistic cotton wool. If I may have leave to exercise this preference I could avoid the use of terms like 'mood-swings', *Cyclothymia* and similar phrases coined to cloak the truth. I could, instead, state my conviction that God does indeed leave our souls

for long periods, almost completely at the mercy of forces beyond our control. At such times He requires nothing of us except patience—and faith that the fog will one day vanish. We must wait quietly and watch vigilantly for a chance to exercise, and so free, our Will.\*

The waiting time may be one of suffering. It may equally be one of great prosperity and complacency. Those of us who are Anglicans very properly pray for God's special deliverance "in the time of our tribulation, in all time of our *wealth*". In periods of well-being (as I suppose we should translate it into Modern English) we lay wads of custom, comfort and self-esteem, over our will, until it is almost too deeply smothered to act at all. But the nature of things must one day defeat our subterfuges, or, to put it into simpler and more precise language, 'God is not mocked'. Sooner or later something will come along (bereavement or sudden poverty or the impact of war) to rip off all the bandagings and demand a decision from our naked Wills.

In times of tribulation, the Devil supplies us with a subtler form of cushioning—numbness, despair ('wan-hope', as it used to be called) and self-pity. From these we can generally extricate ourselves: the chance to do so will come from outside if we keep an eye open for it. But I do not believe it is wise to take up the attitude, in the meantime, that there is just nothing we can do to keep ourselves ready for action.

Harley Street (if I may use the term in a rather vague and extended sense) is, I am afraid, one of the principal channels through which Determinism is seeping into our civilization and, to my mind, rotting some of the foundations. In peace time, it and all it stood for was acquiring such influence over government and legislation as the old priesthoods might well have envied. And most of the opponents who challenged it would easily be labelled 'cranks' and suitably ignored.

Harley Street has gone into khaki now. Some of its most learned and skilful representatives are giving service to the Army, many of them in very humble positions and for a very small reward in guineas. Others are Colonels and Brigadiers, and well worthy of their rank. A certain section of them has convinced Authority of the military necessity for Psychiatry, especially in the selection and dismissal of personnel. They wield powers which are in some ways comparable

\* I am not here referring to that psychological experience which seems rare—and limited to true Saints—technically called the *Dark Night of the Soul*.



to those of the Inquisition. I do not suggest that they imitate the methods of that now-discredited institution. I am not even in a position to judge whether an impartial review of all cases (a thing naturally forbidden) would produce the conclusion that, by and large, those powers are more often exercised to the benefit or the detriment of the Army's efficiency as a fighting instrument. Luckily I am not called upon to judge.

I have found one of the khaki-clad representatives a most stimulating and, in all senses of the word, a most *amusing* acquaintance. He has certainly given me much help and shed a good deal of light upon my difficulties.\*

He was of fighting Scottish origin and had spent much time boxing, collecting Japanese prints, investigating the attitudes of schizophrenic monkeys, walking across deserts in Arizona with his water in a pneumatic pillow and—while remaining a cheerful atheist—generally having life and having it more abundantly than most of us Christians. But I would not be surprised if he ended up in the Roman Catholic Church.

He certainly helped me to rationalize my difficulties and weed a lot of misleading muck out of my mind. He taught me to be ashamed of what was discreditable in my condition, and (more important) not ashamed of what was not. He taught me to talk to fewer people about it when I was most under the strain, and to be a good deal more watchful about the upkeep of the *façade* that all of us must show to the world. His help and friendship were not entirely inspired by curiosity in me as an interesting specimen of Cyclothymia. I regret that events have taken such a turn as to prevent me from ever asking his advice again.

However wide and well-earned his knowledge was, there was one thing he could not explain to me at all and it is so damnably complicated that I am sure I cannot explain it to myself. I only get rare and contradictory glimpses into the meaning of its complexity. I am quite sure that my difficulties have some obscure connection with the apparently unusual intensity of pleasure that I get from art and literature, and with such poor skill as I have managed to develop in creating them.

\* For the old sense of the word 'amusing' see Dr. Johnson's commentary on Shakespeare. He somewhat surprisingly called *Coriolanus* the most amusing of the plays. He meant that it most forced one to *muse* or ponder. I suppose something half-way between 'puzzling' and 'thought-provoking' would convey his meaning to the modern mind.

The pleasure disappears immediately and completely with the first advent of depression. The critical faculty is not destroyed: indeed it is somewhat sharpened. I still know good workmanship from bad, but I can find no joy in the appreciation of it. The creative faculty is, generally, taken entirely from me. Sometimes attempts to revise something I have already begun to create will only end in my spoiling it. At other times, the disability is not so complete.

I did once force myself, with infinite grind and reluctance, to write and finish a three-act play against the desperate resistance of my depression. It even found its way into production—a most skilful production by Denis Arundell, with an excellent caste of London actors and actresses. It is a kind of detective play, of somewhat sombre provincial atmosphere, written in the strictly realistic convention that I usually avoid. Though I generally find great difficulty in writing women's parts and keep the number of female characters down to a sub-Elizabethan minimum, it contains one long and one short part for men but nearly a dozen important ones for women. It is called '*Ladies Beware*'. In theme, treatment, atmosphere and characterization it is utterly unlike anything that I have written. Reading it over now, I can barely recognize my own handiwork.

But for the most part, the advent of depression has meant the abandonment of all creative work. The *desire* to create was as strong as ever, if only because creation would quiet the guilty conscience, the nightmare of being no use in the world. But the power to do so vanished, or was smothered under a blanket of struggling self-hatred. The sickly visions and cynical insights that accompany depression, turned over and over in the mind, may indeed have been a seed-bed for deeper and richer interpretation of life, when the happy and creative mood returned. Meanwhile the attempts to put them on paper generally produced rubbish that made me twiddle my toes with shame.

Even my ordinary conversation, lacking self-confidence, also lacked all spark and spontaneity. I have occasionally earned myself some small reputation as a wit, and I was often told that I had such a reputation among my companions in the ranks. But I noticed that when I tried to say something neat or funny in a bad mood of depression, I surprised myself by an unexpected bitterness and rancour, inflicted pain on my audience, and sometimes turned a friend into a puzzled enemy.

I have now tried to tell my tale without self-pity or exaggeration.

If I have exaggerated anything, it is perhaps the lack of connection between my inner experience and my outward circumstances. I do not know that any misfortune or monotony hastened the coming of depression. But I think that there were certain alleviations which came to me from outside. There was certainly a strong and permanent temptation to take wine as a temporary release. It did not always work, as such. It sometimes produced no effect at all. But it generally took the edge off the feeling of guilty conscience and there were times when, taken in cheerful company, it did work a miracle and bring me a few hours of contentment and even creation. This solace I used cautiously, knowing that the wine, which plays its crucial part in our holiest sacrament, is not a thing to be used wantonly, and perhaps should not be used as a medicine at all. But when I am asked to join lightly in condemning a fellow-creature for spoiling his life with drink, I hesitate and ask for further details. Rich or poor, I am not so much interested in the fact that he had taken *to* drink: I want to know what he is trying to escape *from*.

Another outward circumstance, which was also sporadic in its effects, was the obvious one, change in scene. In depression I naturally craved for a change, any change, in my work and environment, though I soon had to abandon the pathetic delusion that it was bound to effect a cure. I wasted too many so-called holidays wishing that I had at least the anodyne of work, seeing trees and mountains as unreal, cardboard scenery, behind which lurked nameless evil. I settled hopefully in some fresh house, and immediately saw the pleasant welcome of its rooms and furniture take on the same familiar mocking enmity as those from which I had tried to escape. But quite incalculably, the trick sometimes worked. A train journey began in despair might end in release to normality or even, as did my voyage to Jerusalem, in a week of abnormal happiness. A long ten months of slowly diminishing suffering in Beirut were broken by the last few days of my walking tour in Palestine, by six days (once I was free of the long motor-car journey) when I rode, bathed and enjoyed the friendship of my cavalry friends in Northern Syria. Though I returned from both to a disappointing prison of gloom, I think that they made cracks in its wall, cracks which later widened and enabled me to escape. After the second holiday it was certainly easier to rise betimes in the morning in order to fence, ride and feel a man again before returning to the office and feeling a worm.

I was also inspired rather than depressed by a new form of Con-

science, precise and practical where the other had been vague and disabling. My best friend, a priest, once told me that it should always be easy to recognize the voice of the devil from that of God. The former bawls at you, "Do something! Don't sit idle!" The latter tells you quite quietly and precisely what you ought to be doing next. I did not yet get such precise instructions, but I began to wonder whether there was not something unwholesome about being a Captain and having no company of men to care for, in health and welfare and cheerfulness. I began to wonder whether there was not something worse than unwholesome about being in uniform at all, during the greatest war in history, and facing less danger and discomfort than the women and children at home. But all these feelings remained subterranean and formless. It required a chance meeting to bring them to the top.

I was meandering one evening round the *cafés* and hotels of Beirut. I had already had as much as was good for me and was thinking of wandering back to bed. The lights and music had already begun to be dazzling, the seas of chattering faces unreal. Then I suddenly picked out among them one that was familiar, calling up long-forgotten memories. I could not immediately track them down, but as I went over to the owner of the face I remembered where we had met. I even remembered his name. As we shook hands I noticed that he was deeply and genuinely happy. He had been with me at the Dunbar O.C.T.U.—freshly returned, like myself, from the commando raid on the Lofoten Isles, though then in a different ship. He told me that he was now in a Parachute battalion and had been sent to tour Syria and the Lebanon to look for more volunteers among the officers stationed there. He said he would be going next day to Damascus.

I enquired tentatively whether my age and bad eyesight put me out of court as a volunteer, and was assured that they would not. By the end of a cheerful half-hour with me, he had promised to forward my application for parachute training and see that it got through. He scribbled down a few of my particulars in a notebook and told me I need do no more. We parted in great friendship and I went to bed comparatively happy, relying on his word that I would soon be drafted into a Parachute battalion.

I rose early next morning and left a note at his temporary quarters, reminding him of his assurances and telling him that Philip sober was more than eager to ratify the application of Philip tipsy. I got

no reply. All my letters to him remained unanswered. He had either promised more than he could perform or he had been suddenly called away, perhaps to Sicily and death.

I carried on with my familiar routine, though with a somewhat lighter heart. I had at least made my act of Will and retained a curiously vivid recollection of the early morning moment when I had left the decisive note at my friend's lodgings. Meanwhile I sat at my desk and turned over my daily ream or so of paper, signing, initialling, conscientiously reading through all but the most unreadable typescripts. And then one morning my eye was caught by a paper that had come by error into my office-tray. It seemed the most unpromising mess of sections A and sub-paras B, badly ronco-typed on spongy paper. But I deciphered them, and a new life came into the dead words.

I must not make too much of an incident of no military importance, which, as it turned out, was to come to nothing. But since this is a personal record, I may perhaps be permitted to describe my temporary and personal reactions to what I was reading.

It was an official circular inviting junior officers of certain units, of certain age and medical category, to volunteer for work 'of an individual and hazardous nature' to be preceded by parachute training. I hesitated, decided, and then wondered what had caused my hesitation; things look so incredibly different before and after the making of such acts of Will. And the main feeling now was that I must get busy at once.

There were high and seemingly unsurmountable barricades between my application and my acceptance for the work. This time I would have no friend, no commando comrade, to help me over them. I must do the wire-pulling myself, and it would need all my ingenuity and persistence.

The game was soon afoot. After doubting through ten dreary months whether any game in the world could be worth the playing, I felt the chains of all doubt falling from my wrists, the doors of my prison-house swinging open to light and reason and fresh air.

### MALICE

Man is the slave of Habit. 'Twould appear  
As if I'd caught one irksome habit here—

(Limping where Kipling soared) t'inflict a curse,  
 After each bad prose chapter, of worse verse.  
 The theme of TROUGH is unpoetick quite  
 Unless I imitate that Age of Spite  
 Which spawned the already-quoted repartee  
 Lord Sandwich got from Mr. Wilkes, M.P.,  
 The age when Malice could, at any time,  
 Sharpen its darts by casting 'em in Rhyme.

My psychiatrick friends, whose zeal for facts  
 Lists a Man's thoughtless sayings with his acts,  
 May welcome and may like to make a note  
 Of what in "Cyclothymic" depths I wrote,  
 And (to fill gaps in their own type of mind)  
 Some humour and some poetry may find.

My other friends I'd gladlier amuse  
 With rhymes I wrote when deepest in the blues.  
 No longer topical, but short and clear,  
 And making plain what might not else appear:—  
 However long and tediously I prate  
 Of Christian love and friendship, I *can* hate.

#### 1. TO A SOCIETY BEAUTY

Your grandsire earned a Title and a big 'un,  
 (In days before they could be bought by Jews).  
 You hire it out to teach the girls of Wigan,  
 About a face cream that you never use.

#### 2. TO A MODERNIST BISHOP

Progress (like Providence) hath her times and seasons,  
 Patience, my Lord! Mankind will yet escape  
 From that false pride which still rejects your reasons,  
 For thinking Christ the offspring of an Ape.

## TIME IN THE EAST

## 3. TO AN ACTOR

(On the occasion of a Royal Matinee given to  
celebrate his fifty years on the stage.)

See here the King and Queen of a great Nation  
Brought in to honour this, your fiftieth year  
Of patient and unsparring concentration,  
Upon the business of your own career.

## 4. TO THE AUTHOR OF A CERTAIN BOOK

Nymphs err. They always have. But you make money  
By varnishing the errors they commit,  
Till Sin appears so elegant, so funny,  
And Eighteenth Century Smut parades as Wit.

## 5. TO A METIUSALITE PLAYWRIGHT

The God you left, leaving your mother's knee,  
Fashioned a world even subtler than your mind,  
Where clowns have eyes His handiwork to see,  
And Genius lends her splendour to the blind.

## INTERMEZZO

And now, good reader (and psychiatrist)  
Observe my gradual climb from Trough to Crest,  
The Hatred waning, as you would expect,  
While Love returns, or at the least, Respect.

## 6. TO A.A.M.

(On the critics' reception of his more serious plays.)

'They dubbed you jester, and though we were glad you  
Showed deeper thoughts, for which your jests were blinds,  
The critics disagreed. For what right had you  
To ask those gentlemen to change their minds?

7. TO THE DEEPEST THINKER OF OUR AGE  
(of whom more anon.)

I'm hitting right and left, I'll try to lam you,  
Your style's bad puns. You only praise what's old.  
You've turned to Rome. The beer you drink—But, damn you,  
How can one yelp against that heart of gold?



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CREST

" . . . and that which I now write unto thee is not so much that thou shouldst live in this course, as that thou shouldst *rejoice* in so living and having lived."

SOURCE UNKNOWN.

#### I. DANSE MACABRE

I DO not know how to describe those first few weeks of release from nightmare, when I seemed to walk on air from dawn to dusk, and at night to hear the stars shouting together for joy. Nothing was changed, and yet all was changed. Beirut was its gimcrack self, sweltering in heat and damp: but climate meant nothing now, and there was a new mystery and romance behind the mouldering garden gates, or at the top of the twisting, vine-covered stairways. Office routine was still office routine, and I seemed to see with newly-sharpened eyes how large a proportion of our work was a pointless treadmill of papers dictated to us by somebody's stupidity, pedantry or vanity. But I was quite happy to keep the treadmill turning at twice its former pace, laughing at its pompous creaks and groans. And meanwhile there was another, though smaller, proportion which was really helping to win the war.

I naturally continued to rise before daybreak and I was never tempted to waste any afternoon in siesta. There was far too much to do, astonishingly worth doing. It was all a matter of trifles that had seemed weary and burdensome a week or two back. It is almost impossible to convey in print why and how they had suddenly become so delightful.

The task is made a little easier by the fact that (for about the twentieth time in my life) I had resolved to keep a diary. It need hardly be said that within a week or two the daily instalments (for about the twentieth time in my life) had ceased to be daily and were threatening to peter out altogether. But fragments of it survive and enable me now to make some picture of the exciting world I was inhabiting.

The first entry is dated Friday the 13th day of the month.

Being a Christian, I try not to be superstitious, but I could not help wishing that another day had been selected for the first interview between us who had volunteered for 'hazardous' work and the three officers who had been sent to Beirut to give us the 'once-over'.

It was not easy to keep myself informed of such dates and arrangements. According to the Sections A and sub-*paras* B, I was hopelessly ineligible—wrong age, wrong unit, unsuitable eyesight. My formal application "through the usual channels" had got just as far as my C.O.'s desk (some 15 yards) and no farther. His eyebrows had bristled, his Irish eyes flashed. "You are ten years over the age-limit," he said, "and that's the end of it!" I had to resort to most informal channels, and I was sorry that it had to be behind his back. I went to a neighbouring office and extracted my information from a young Captain with the most luxuriant moustachios I had ever seen.\*

He made his daily procession past my window in the wake of a podgy fox terrier as dignified as himself. I followed at a discreet distance, papers in hand, with some official treadmill excuse for visiting his office. Here was hoarded all the correspondence about the volunteering and the selecting officers, and I was generally able to get at enough of it to serve my purpose. On the inauspicious Friday which saw the birth of my short-lived diary, I was successful in discovering that the arrival of the selection board had been postponed till the following Tuesday. I was left with a clear week end in which to think over my folly in volunteering, but not to regret it.

I decided to take one of our infrequent week-ends off, and to spend Saturday afternoon and Sunday in the cottage whither some friends of mine, a French professor and his children, escaped to the fresh mountain air from the Turkish Bath of Beirut in August.

I had given Claude and Claudine, aged 8 and 4, many pick-a-back rides round their house in Beirut. It was delightful to be welcomed at the garden gate of their mountain cottage with loud shouts of "Le vieux chameaul Le vieux chameaul" It was good to climb pine-trees with Claude and to be gravely instructed by Monique (his absent mother's little sister, hardly older than himself) in the art of housekeeping. And the day ended with a grand pick-a-back tourna-

\* They were even larger than the more famous pair which occasionally arrived in Beirut by an early morning train from Aleppo, and served as a fringe for so much liquor, blasphemy, good fellowship and common sense: of these latter's owner I shall have a word to say hereafter. I am a bad hand at likenesses, but there is a tolerable portrait of him, *blaspheming*, opposite page 54.

ment (the Professor providing the second steed) on a back yard, fortunately well fenced, which overlooked one of the village's many precipices.

The Professor had warned me that we should live in simple and rustic fashion. He was right. The 'Messieurs'—which also incorporated the 'Dames'—was a somewhat odorous cupboard about the size of Little Ease. There was no nonsense about its sanitary equipment, which consisted of a small hole in the floor and a bundle of old newspapers. The bathroom was also the woodshed. Its *soi-disant* shower-bath worked horizontally. One extracted a cork from a rusty pipe in the wall and was immediately struck amidships by a jet of cold water. One had to dodge about a bit in order to get other parts of the anatomy into what musketry-experts call 'the beaten zone of fire', and only an acrobat could get his toes properly irrigated. One pantingly replaced the cork (which defied all the laws of hydraulics by not popping out again), dried oneself on a pocket handkerchief, and scuttled out to an excellent French breakfast. It was all first class entertainment.

On Sunday morning the family and I paid a visit to the village church. A Maronite mass is something of a curiosity. There must be few places outside the Lebanon where a priest, in obedience to Rome but a married man, can say the office in the local language Arabic, not Latin. I, as heretic, had only come from interest. The Professor spoke no Arabic and the mass must have been for him strictly orthodox in its unintelligibility.

In the afternoon we visited a rich and hospitable neighbour who was giving a concert of classical music in his far from rustic house. I listened mainly from outside, from the garden where the children were playing. I like folk-tunes, and can dimly guess what Mozart is getting at. Bach and Beethoven are leagues beyond me, and Wagner mere noise. I made a few tactful visits to the music room and even contributed a *pas seul* to the huge delight of the Palestinian orchestra, who egged me on to further exertions in the way of ballet-parody, until I had to make a swift retirement to the bathroom, where the shower-bath was vertical and luxurious.

I remember vividly that in one of the intervals of my mock choreography, I leaned against the bookcase to take breath and picked out a book to glance at. Though squeezed between Balzac and a local guide-book, it inexplicably proved to be a *Manuel de Chirurgie Militaire*. The illustrations were fortunately uncoloured, but they gave

one a pretty comprehensive idea of what could happen to the limbs of those who volunteer to dance a step or two in the saraband of modern war.

But most of Sunday was spent at home, and devoted to an equally amateurish display of a more sedate form of art. The audience consisted of three round-eyed children. I performed with a paint-brush on a roll of wall-paper. Its front side bore a particularly distressing *Wilhelmina Stitch* pattern of roses and trellis work: but its back provided a blank surface on which I could effect my large-scale daubs. I painted, for Claude, a misshapen racing camel on which sat Napoleon—the young lank-haired hollow-cheeked Napoleon of the Egyptian conquest and the Palestinian failure. For Claudine I produced an even less shapely horse carrying Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, the only local celebrity I could think of who was of Claudine's sex. Being luckily ignorant of *Palmyran local colour*, I caparisoned the beast with a long surcoat reaching almost to the hocks and saving me from the difficulty of trying to draw a horse's legs, which, after a man's hands, are the most difficult things in the world to draw. Light began to fail before I could do anything for Monique, but I promised her a St. Joan of Arc, and sent her a tolerable one, with the horse's legs copied from a book, about a month later.

The old paint-tubes I had brought with me, marked '*Marabu-Plakat Farbe*', recalled a curious memory. They had been bought with the royalties on the German translation of my book which I had managed to spend in three days in Hamburg. I am very glad I brought them away, to amuse three French children in the Lebanon, instead of leaving them to be blown to pieces by the R.A.F.

Towards evening, Napoleon and Zenobia were safely drawing-pinned on to the nursery walls, and I started a semi-jocose lesson in English on the balcony. As a good Shakespearean I began like Queen Kate's teacher with '*de hand, de fingres, de bilbow*'. Claude was soon bored, finding the whole business too like school for a summer-holiday's amusement: but it was Claudine who brought matters to a more decisive close. She interrupted my anatomical pedantries with the somewhat startling question (may I repeat that she was only four years old?)

"*Et qu'est-ce que veut dire le mot anglais, 'f—g-fellow'?*"

But I am old-fashioned and perhaps too easily shocked.

Monique hurried her little niece and nephew off to bed. I was left

alone on the rickety balcony, with all Lebanon beneath my feet. That alone was enough food for thought and wonder, but I had other things to think of as well. There were my own children whom I had left four years ago, only seen since by snatches, but not seen at all for two. There was a certain book I had glanced through in the intervals of dancing. There were the strange times in which it is our lot and our privilege to live. There were the incalculably greater stretches of time that had passed over Lebanon, each century perhaps seeming to its denizens as strange as ours seems to us.

## II. BRAVADO

THERE was no doubt that Lebanon looked magnificent by moonlight from my balcony. By day, its ridges take rather arid colours and shapes, which are a little wearisome to an eye accustomed to Scottish or Pyrenean Peaks. But below me now was fold upon fold of delicate blue and lustrous black, with creeping mist to soften every outline. I wondered—after my day of botching—what artist would have done it most justice. It would have made a good subject for a woodcut by Hokusai, though that great mingler of grave and gay, that 'master with the monkey's heart' as the Japanese called him, would have had difficulty (now that Claudine was in bed) in finding the comic relief he always sought to season Majesty. No, Lebanon by moonlight was more in Hiroshige's field of fire. He would have made a masterpiece of it.

My thoughts turned to the enterprise that awaited me down below in Beirut. There was still plenty of time to draw back: officially I had as yet made no application. But I felt no desire to alter my resolve to make one, when Tuesday brought the chance. I asked myself what it was that was driving me on, and I could find no ready answer.

I was, of course, the child of my epoch. I went to school in 1914, before England had ever seen the curiosity called 'conscript', when the elder boys were eagerly seeking their opportunity to fight and saying exactly what they thought about those who took (in the phrase coined in those days) a 'cushy' job. As my school-time went on, every day might bring news that the most enterprising ones, with whom I have lived and studied, had succeeded only too well, and would never come back for any Old Boys' Dinner. More recently I

had seen only too much 'cushiness' and was stale with the office work. I wanted to feel a little more like a man and a little less like a piece of over-fed Red Tape.

One must be wary of talking about patriotism these days, but I remembered former days when it was still counted a virtue. England's power was originally built upon two things—her insular position and a certain spirit of adventure amongst her sons. Mechanical invention is already stripping her of the first advantage and, when next there is a war in Europe, she will probably be as easy to invade as Belgium. If she has by then succeeded in obliterating the second, smoothing it out under Social Security and smooth Blankets of Routine, her position will be precarious indeed.

If I feel a little pride in my country and its past, I certainly feel pride in my type, the type that was trained to be that pathetic anachronism 'a scholar and a gentleman' and then found itself growing up to be that permanent misfit, a creative artist. Such persons as I cannot help feeling that other men are continually classing us, untested, among—

The brittle Intellectuals  
Who crack beneath the strain.

We do not think these two lines are the last word in human wisdom, and we seek opportunities to prove our contention. We would even like an opportunity to prove that the poet who wrote them thereby committed or implied a certain treason against his own kind.\*

Finally, and perhaps strongest of all, came Curiosity. I wanted to know more about the venture, and about the enemy-occupied country into which it would presumably carry me. Last but not least, I wanted to know how I myself was likely to behave. I have generally boasted of being able to keep a clear head in a mild emergency, though I can grow woefully muddle-headed in the toils of comfort and tedium. I simply had no idea at all whether I could do so when the emergency was not mild, when there was death about, and when No. 1 on my right and No. 3 on my left might at any moment cease to be even numbers and revert to tomato soup. I was curious to know exactly how No. 2 would begin to act in such

\* I use two words advisedly. I have always regarded Kipling as a *poet* and as a good one. I was naturally sneered at in Oxford for this strange opinion. Mr. T. S. Eliot had not then bewildered the intellectuals by championing Kipling's verse. But I also felt no surprise, when I read Benda's neglected masterpiece *La Trahison des Clercs*, at finding Kipling cited as the best English example of (intellectual) *treason*.

circumstances. I am still curious on the subject. I have not yet had my chance to find out.

I had an odd feeling that the experience might perhaps help me to realize the only real ambition in my life and to write something rather better than I have yet written. If only my descriptive skill could even begin to approach that of the great writers of the past I certainly have more to describe, in more varied kinds of life, than most of them: I thought that battle might set the crown on this rich variety of experience.

I do not know when I first began to compare my own life, at whatever distance Humility dictates, with that of the illustrious. Presumably it was in the nursery, where I, like all children, was told stories about the great men of the past, presented with books about them and told to imitate their deeds. For that matter we are still exhorted from pulpits and platforms to emulate the great, and most people seem to enjoy this, so long as no immediate action is expected from them. I myself have perhaps remained too much of a child and take what I am taught too literally.

I had spent my day, and a very happy day, in the company of children. My mind was still bright with the colours I had been spreading on the back-side of wall-paper, nominally for their pleasure. As I stood on the balcony and looked over Lebanon, I felt a childish desire to paint the whole roll and hang it round the nursery like a frieze. I would fill it with great men: I would not bother with the few writers who had visited these parts. I wanted to depict, in all their panoply, that curiously large number of the world's leaders whom I have already listed (and even caricatured) as having once visited the little strip of coast that lay between me and Acre. I could add to the list now. My 'Riders along the Sea', beginning with Thothmes and Rameses, Sargon and Nebuchadnezzar, in their war-chariots, could also include Cyrus, trotting at the head of his Medes and Persians. I would like to think that, before him, David might have taken refuge in these parts, bringing his weather-beaten little band of irregulars or might have come later, on formal visits to Hiram of Tyre, to discuss the felling of cedars for his temple. Alexander the Great certainly passed this way. He would take up a good deal of the frieze with his Macedonian generals, the Ptolemies and Seleuci and Antigoni who later came back from the Punjab to be rulers in these parts. They spent much time here in their first march, for the siege of Tyre delayed them a year and more.

I could perhaps paint a recognizable picture of Hannibal by blacking out one eye: I fear he could hardly be riding by on one of his traditional elephants; for he had lost them all at Zama before the closing circle of death drove him to Sidon—Saida as we call it now, just behind that lump of rock on my left. I would not know how to make Pompey recognizable except that I believe he had a nervous habit of scratching his chin. Julius Cæsar, bald and laurelled, is an easier subject: he must have passed this way on that very march to Pontus which occasioned his boast about coming, seeing and over-coming: I could paint him in a litter writing dull *Commentaries* on the journey. I do not know whether I could presume to include, riding meekly on an ass, One who certainly visited this Syro-Phœnician coast, heard and commended here a most memorable saying.\* Legend also has it that Muhammad rode to Palestine on the back of a high-flying Djinn: he may have circled over Lebanon in order to make the proper dive for the landing ground: you never can tell with Djinns. Beneath him would ride Saladin, born in a little fortress on the distant Tigris, and Cœur de Lion from still more distant Anjou. Behind them could come Sultan Baibars with his huge half-Russian frame decked in the spoils of Egypt, and Grand Turks like Selim and Solyman the Magnificent. Then the array would have to grow dimmer and more recondite: I would try to find a place in it for poor Fakr-al-Din—the only native Lebanese in this pageant of his country's conquerors—in some costume that would suggest both the Druse village where he was born and the Renaissance Italy in which he had left his heart. But the procession could emerge from obscurity again with Napoleon, shaking his fist at the English frigates that harassed his march and stopped him at Acre, well short of Beirut. After him, Ibrahim Pasha could lead Mehmet Ali's armies against the Turk, whose lordship was already crumbling to the ruins over which Allenby came riding by. I do not think Lawrence accompanied him: I fancy he went inland by Damascus, but he certainly came here earlier and, to be strictly accurate, I should have to show him riding a bicycle, on one of the archæological expeditions of his pre-war youth.

The list is over-long. It would have taken me many week-ends to paint my roll of wall-paper. It was better to forget the whole notion, take a last glance at the mist and the mountains, looking more Japanese than ever under the high moon, and tiptoe past snoring children to my bed.

\* Mark VII, 24-30.



## III. PINE-NEEDLES

WHEN I got back to Beirut on Monday, by the early morning bus, I discovered that the Father of Moustachios had gone sick. I traced him to his quarters: he was in bed, with his fox-terrier podgily ensconced beneath. I tried to elicit the time and place of Tuesday's interview, but I failed to elicit anything at all. It would be difficult to burgle his office during his absence, and I spent much of the day wondering through what channels I could put my private intelligence service to work.

I was still in some doubt when I heard the dawn *muezin* next morning and rose to ride. I felt that the occasion permitted a little extravagance, and instead of bicycling I took a taxi through the twilight to the Damascus road. I trotted out alone without even my Polish friend. I ducked under the trees of the avenue, withered the musical-comedy Druse sentinel at the Residency with a look that made him stand up properly and salute me, and was soon plunging into the *Forêt des Pins*.

Beirut—or Baruth as they called it then—was famous in Crusading days for the magnificent pine forests that girdled its walls. They still stand, and still stretch mile after mile, though they now contain, temporarily, I hope, much corrugated iron and barbed wire.

Open downs apart, there can be few sensations in the world like that of galloping on a really good horse over sandy tracks, through

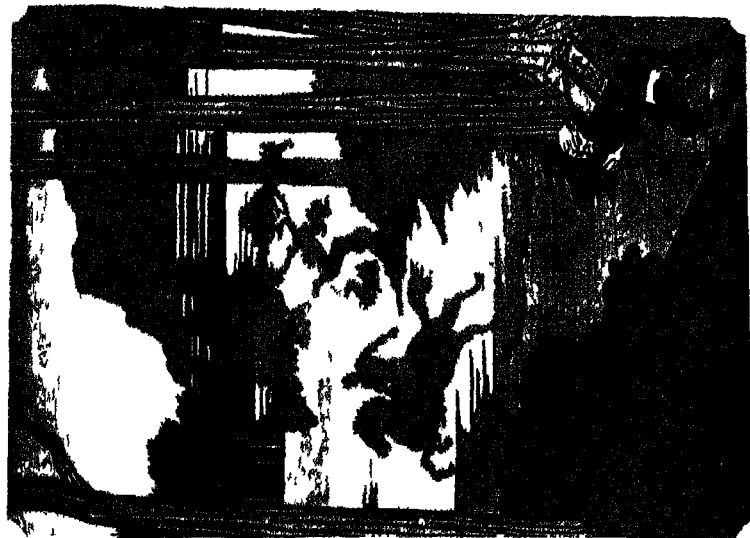
Pines and pines and the shadow of pines,  
As far as the eye can see.

The pictorial effects were fascinating. The sun, barely risen, sent his level rays through the tawny tree-trunks, splashing brown with red and gold, and touching to emerald the nether fronds of the dark green foliage above. Here and there was a broken splash of scarlet from a red-tiled roof. Hokusai would be more in his element here. He would have found some clever trick to reproduce the silhouette effect of figures on horseback looming up through the sun-veiled streams of dust that other hoofs had raised. And he could have rounded off the picture with the figure of one of the quaintly gnarled Lebanese labourers who were threading their way to work along the forest paths, or were already bowed beneath the first burden of their long



THE DESCENT ON  
THE LEBANON

*With apologies to the  
Jumabutsu Eagle of  
Hiratsugu (1797-1858)*



DAWN IN THE FORET DES  
PINS (from the Ninety-Nine  
Views of Mount Lebanon)

*With apologies  
to Hokusai  
(1760-1849)*



day. It was past such beauty that I trotted or galloped in the fresh breeze of dawn.

I returned for a hasty breakfast and went early to the office to change and take a shower bath. I found I had no time to do so: my intelligence service had not been idle, and reported that the Selection Committee was already at work. I had to hurry, and oddly enough, back to the pine-forest: authority had chosen an amusingly inappropriate spot for the decisive interview—the amphitheatre of an open-air cinema in one of the camps beneath the pines. I found the place still smelling of the fresh morning air. A hundred tiny cicalas were still keeping up the chirruping chorus with which they had greeted the dawn.

I had come unprepared. I had no idea how I was going to explain or justify my presence among the official candidates. No one would even know my name: it did not appear in triplicate upon any application form. I could only try my luck and hope for the best. And my luck held.

It turned out that no one knew anybody's name. The 'usual channels' had got twisted up in their usual serpentine mess: the applications had gone astray. The three selecting officers had reached the open-air cinema to find no papers of any sort awaiting them. Such things happen daily, and prevent the Army from being completely immobilized by Red Tape. They also give the interloper his chance.

The preliminary questions from understrappers brought me quickly up against my own difficulties: I became unpleasantly conscious of my age, my marriage, my eyesight and my other ineligibilities. I began a laboured tale about a commando (restricted to unmarried men, under 30, medically A 1 and able to drive a car) into which I had gate-crashed (B 1, over 40, and unable to drive anything but a horse). I was promptly and properly cut short with "Well, you can't gate-crash here!"

All this was foreseeable and, to a certain extent, foreseen. In Biblical phrase, my strength was to sit still. I sat still, listening to the cicalas, for the better part of an hour. Sooner or later someone was bound to ask who was the unauthorized b——r in riding-breeches, sitting about and saying nothing. The plan worked, as do most plans that are simple and sufficiently impudent. I finally received a gruff order to "Come back and see the Colonel at 2.30". I rose, a little stiff, saluted in my most formal manner and went my way.

I had at least gained time to bathe, to change into a more pedestrian uniform, and even to do a little office-work.

Long before 2.30 I was back in the cinema with sufficient lunch inside me to make me feel ready to tackle a dozen colonels. By about three I was sitting at a camp table (with my spectacles carefully pocketed) saying my little piece to an unexpectedly sympathetic audience of three.

'Higher Authority' is curiously human when you meet it in person, instead of in typescript—especially when clerical error has deprived it of any papers. I think I played my unpromising hand with reasonable skill, though, looking back, I could think afterwards of several mistakes I made. Perhaps I flatter myself. Perhaps the measure of success I attained was due to no skill or subtlety, but merely to the fact that my three interviewers could see through all my manoeuvres to some basic sincerity of purpose. They were better chosen and of wider insight than most Boards I have faced.

Many of the questions and answers were either too technical or too personal to be recorded here. But when I had to admit to being a married man and a father, I said that I regarded this as no bar at all. I had talked it all out with my wife long ago. To be widowed is a great disaster for any woman. But it is surely worse for a man and woman to be separated by death before they have even married, perhaps before they have even met. Every unmarried man killed in battle leaves behind him some possible mate, and her lot is surely harder than the widow's. She has no memories to look back upon, no children to make her life worth while. In the old days before Authority had learned to make proper provision for the dependants of those it must send to death, it naturally hesitated to issue an order which might imply starvation for a whole family. In these days of pensions and allowances, it is the unmarried who need to be preserved from spiritual starvation and sterility.

I said something like this, though in less highfalutin fashion, to the three representatives of Higher Authority at the camp table, and they nodded grave agreement. I said, and heard, a great number of other things which cannot be repeated. I gathered that for one reason or another my application would go forward, at least on its first stage.

I rose from the interview with the conviction that I had done my best, and that my audience of three were unusually well equipped for sifting out the genuine from the melodramatic. I walked gingerly

away, for I am as blind as a bat without my spectacles. The sun was bright and hot, the cicalas were still shouting their little hearts out among the pine-needles, and in my own heart there was a strange peace.

## IV. C.O.

THERE was one more interview before me. It was likely to prove a short one, but the thought of it filled me with some compunction. Somehow or other I must contrive to tell my C.O. that his emphatic . . . "and there's an end of it!" had been for me little more than a beginning; that for some weeks I had been working behind his back for a purpose that he had in effect forbidden.

But matters would certainly not be improved by delay, and I sought his office that same afternoon. I told him my story. His eyebrows, the *sourcils en bataille* that were famous through all Beirut, bristled at me with their usual ferocity. Beneath them the blue Irish eyes had a kindlier twinkle than ever. I had only to blurt out a few faltering apologies, to find him replying with far more understanding than an insubordinate captain should expect from his colonel. I blundered on, trying to put into shape a thought which had been haunting the back of my mind for some weeks: that, in all humility, I had no real apology to offer: that I had been acting, and must still act, on orders from an authority that overrides that of *King's Regulations*.

He did not laugh at me. He had sometimes done so before, and I had allowed myself to be angered by his laughter. I had often thought it strange that, brought up in much the same tradition as myself, sharing many tastes and distastes with him, I had so seldom succeeded in feeling at ease with him or (as I suspected) making him feel at ease with me. Kindliness and understanding on the one side, respect and affection on the other, had failed to surmount the barriers that are raised by ten years' difference in age. Now the barriers fell suddenly flat, for five short minutes, and perhaps for the only time in our lives we were completely at one.

It was a privilege to hear, from a man of much more experience than my own, that some of my foolish ideas were perhaps less foolish than I had feared. It was interesting to speak of the whole matter in more general and impersonal terms. He agreed with me that one must occasionally embark on a seemingly uncalled-for venture in order to prove the wisdom of half-forgotten platitudes. He agreed

with me that when certain persons had transformed 'Safety First' from a motorists' motto into a general war-cry for England's rising generation, they were, in effect, inviting Hitler to come over and establish the Kingdom of Hell upon the ruins of our Empire. But there was nothing new or original about what he said, nothing upon which Time can have any effect. It was an ancient wisdom that had been known before ever there was an England or an Ireland on the map: it is one that will be lost again and recaptured again, long after both have vanished from the world.

He was as courteous as ever. He was also tactful. He allowed me to take my own departure with an almost discourteous abruptness. I was somewhat strung up after some weeks of effort and scheming: I suddenly found that I was wanting to cry, and I did not wish to do so in his presence.

#### V. BLURRED

It is often a good thing at times of tension to find some quiet task that one has forgotten or neglected, and settle down to it as though there was no excitement in the air. My interview with my C.O. reminded me that he had given me a job which I had long neglected. I might soon be leaving Beirut, so I had better hurry up and finish the translating of the lines he had given me.

I found his slips of paper in the same drawer with other attempts I had made in the art of translation, and settled down to consider the lot.

"Reading a good book in translation," said Don Quixote, "is like looking at a beautiful tapestry from the wrong side." The simile is marvellously apt, and it is well to remember that the most careful translation not only conveys an extremely blurred impression of the original, but can give rise to very considerable misunderstandings. When the translation is not careful, or when the matter is simply untranslatable (as happens fairly frequently in all languages) these misunderstandings can cause no end of bother. They have frequently done so in international relations, and we had had a few examples of the trouble at Beirut.

To me, the translator's text should always be taken from St. Paul — 'the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life'. Literal exactitude can produce a greater parody of the original than the widest licence,

as when the polite Armenian priest, explaining a programme of sacred music to a visitor, rendered "*Behold, the High Priest cometh,*" as "Look out, an important clergyman is arriving." Patience is also necessary, for to reproduce the essential spirit in slightly varying form is a far more laborious task than plodding literalism.

It can also be a very delightful one, and the delight is increased by the difficulties one has to surmount. I have had most experience in the hardest school of all—in translating verse, sometimes for my own interest, sometimes for practical stage purposes.

The first essential in translating poetry seems to me that the result must be poetry. Gilbert Murray transforms the Milonic lines of Æschylus into the inappropriate idiom of Swinburne. But he is a poet: and purely on that count I put him far above the mere scholars, and, indeed, into the top place as an interpreter to English people of the spirit of Greek drama.

One point is often missed. Translators naturally begin by trying to reproduce the grammatical structure of the original, and will sometimes neglect all other duties in order to preserve it. Yet grammatical structure is clearly the least important thing; it may mean quite a different thing to persons of different races. Even the order of words produces on them totally different effects. Changes from active to passive, from statement to question, from operative noun to operative adjective, may leave the spirit of the original untouched and help it to flow. Attempts to avoid such changes may cramp and kill. Take Molière's couplet on the Puritans of his age:—

*Ils veulent que chacun soit aveugle comme eux,  
C'est être libertin que d'avoir de bons yeux.*

You can turn that into such halting blank verse as—

They want each man to be as blind as they.  
It's to be libertine to have good eyes.

But that is not translation: the whole fire and briskness has vanished, and literalness lords it over dead ashes. I submit that in order to *translate* one must turn the couplet upside down and write something more like:—

If they are blind, need we their blindness share?  
Is it worldliness to see things as they are?



Again, I always think that the standard translation of Simonides' famous epitaph on the dead at Thermopylae, suffers from some of the same deadening caution:—

Go tell the Spartans, thou that passest by,  
That here obedient to their laws we lie.

'Laws' is a very dubious translation of the original, and the version also has the obvious fault of wasting four words and much emphasis on the single and unimportant vocative, 'stranger'. It is little more than a formality, and I would rather leave it out altogether and write:—

Go thou to Sparta. There let it be said  
That we obeyed their orders, and are dead.

What my C.O. had given me was mostly lines from early Latin authors, lines that will seem almost hackneyed to scholars, though woefully abstruse to the unclassically-educated. The first was—

*Unus homo nobis cunctando restituit rem*

and for this I wanted to throw over all my scholarship and suggest:

One man by dawdling saved the thing called Rome.

Yet, remembering that the original was not a single line but part of a narrative passage, I decided (though not at all pleased with it) on:

So one man dallied—and our cause was saved.

The most complex though not the most difficult task was Livius's epitaph on himself:—

*Nemo me lacrimis decoret, nec funera fleu  
Faxit. Cur? Volito vivus per ora virum.*

It presented the double problem of alliteration and very archaic language. I tried to reproduce its crabbed and almost medieval spirit by:—

Let none betaint my tomb with tears nor mourn with  
moping mind,  
One who still lives and flits athwart the mouths of all  
mankind.

But far and away the toughest job I had been given was Tyrtaeus's quatrain—

(Ὁὐ μ' ἔστι, παρθενικαὶ μολιγάρυνες ἱεροφῶνοί,  
Γυνῆ φέρειν δύναται. βάλε δὴ, βίλε κήρυκος εἶην,  
Ὅς τ' ἐπὶ κύματος ἄνθος ἄμ' ἄλκύνεσσι ποτῆται  
Νήδεες ἦτορ ἔχων, ἰλιπόρφυρος εἶαρος ὕρνυ

This presented practically every difficulty one meets in translation. One always has to throw something away (trying to jettison what is least important) as I had had to throw away the provocative note that the question mark gives to Ennius's second line. But how could I get into a quatrain more than half of the packed *nuances* of Tyrtaeus? The main thing that went by the board was the ornithology, for which perhaps there is no equivalent in the English bird-life. I fancy that the poet was picturing himself among the maidens as some comparatively large and heavy sea-bird that can be seen flying in company with lightly skimming terns. But I certainly had no room for such subtleties if I was to include the more obvious beauties of the original. Even so, I had to play sad havoc with the order of the words and (far more important) the impact of ideas on the mind of readers. I did my best, and the result was:—

'Now fail my knees beneath me. I cannot join your dance,  
O maiden voices, calling, falling, sweeter than honeyed gold.  
Would I with you like sea-birds o'er flowers of foam could  
glance,  
On purple wing, young as the Spring, fearless—who now  
am old.'

It did not satisfy me. None of my versions satisfy me. Still less will they satisfy my readers. One of the pleasures of translation is that it can be a game as well as a training, and a game where there is no final umpire and each competitor can go on imagining that he is the winner. But before I am condemned as an easy loser, let my judges at least try to tackle the same jobs themselves.

*Vita brevis, ars longa*, might be continued by *et translatio longior*. I know no literary task that can consume so much time, and I was in haste to finish, foolishly expecting a telephone call at any moment to summon me away from Beirut, perhaps to an unnaturally *breve* *vitam*. I have more leisure now and would like to stake my reputation as a translator on the bit of work that I have had more time to polish.

It is a translation of what seems to me to be an exceedingly beautiful

poem written in Norwegian, and so out of the reach of most English readers. Its author, Nordahl Grieg (a grand-nephew of the composer), was making a name for himself as a playwright before the war. He was a strong Left-Winger until his ideas were somewhat altered by the Russian attack on Finland in 1939. In April, 1940, he escaped from the German inrush, taking with him—by ironic chance—much of the gold reserve of the National Bank of Norway, disguised in the Norse equivalent of Tate Cube Sugar boxes, and delivering it safely to his exiled government. He has since been killed in battle against the Germans.\*

The poem is a long and (to my mind) a most moving one, and I am only printing such fragments of my translation (done, roughly, into the original metres) as are likely to make most appeal outside Norway. I have walked a little on the Norwegian coasts and mountains, and can feel the loving exactitude of the descriptions. But those of us who have only looked into the eyes of a Norwegian soldier or sailor in a London street can easily appreciate the '*som smil og som stal*' of the 20th line:—

## NORWAY

## I

Lcad-grey and toppling seas beset  
A stormbound coast.  
Seaward the boat's crew strains, its net  
Stiffened with frost.  
This is Norway.

Folk pass, grey, through the streets at morn,  
Out of the gloom.  
Gloom falls again, and they return,  
Grey, to their home.  
This is Norway.

A patch of tilth where the great winds speed  
From the upland waste.  
Crofts that are built in the teeth of Need,  
Man bowed to the blast.  
This is Norway,  
Norway, our land.

\* Since my return to England, Mr. Gathorne Hardy has published translations of his war-poems, prefaced by a far better informed account of Grieg's life, death and most attractive personality. *All That is Mine Demand*. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1944.)

## II

This—but much more.

Not the days of her want—lift your brow to the skies!  
Storm rustles, light breaks. This is Norway. O eyes,  
Half smile and half steel that look out from her shore!

Yes, she is poor.

But with waterfalls veiled in a million-jewelled gossamer,  
And silver her ice, her trees rich with blossom, her  
Sun tingling warm as a mantle of fur.

Yes, she is grey.

*But the heart leaps blood-red at her scent of wild cherry,*  
And Youth rides her breezes, unresting, unweary,  
Sweeping blue o'er her peaks like a torrent at play.

Strait she may be.

But on Karasjok's ice the swan greets her swan-lover,  
And the seagulls o'er Skagerrak dart, scout and hover:  
All Norway between, but they whisper 'Free, free!'

Sword in her hand.

So the wind round the cairn shrieks in storm-naked wrath,  
To the fjords and the forests and islands beneath.  
Oh, take from me all things, but leave me my land!

## III

Through the bleak desert, the frost-laden white,  
Lover seeks lover.

Fiercer each flame for the other,  
As the cold grows more bitter, forlorn the night.  
So our heart seeks Norway's: so blazes within,  
Through the cold and the darkness, a fierier brand:  
So are we one, though we lose, though we win,  
We and our land!

## IV

Behold this wonder:  
Our blanched nights,  
*Bird-Mountain sleeping*  
In midnight sun.

A light that rests dreaming  
On wrinkled rocks  
Till sudden it splinters  
Into a thousand wings.

So foams the light,  
So sinks to rest.  
Oh, peak of whiteness  
Lit by sun, lit by seal

## V

Come to our hearts. O Norway,  
In that inmost place for a while.  
Sleep in our darkness, tender  
As birds on a summer's tree  
Or trumpet your pride with the splendour  
Of sharp rocks fronting the sea,  
Hymn of our life and defender  
From your peaks to your outmost isle!

So on slopes by her mountain torrents  
The grass in the sun is spread,  
And the fragrant scent of her clover  
Drifts by to the hayfield's edge,  
Where the babe draws milk from his mother  
In the quiet shade of the hedge:  
But the stream dashes over and over,  
Like a stallion tossing his head.

## VI

May our hearts be filled with Norway!  
Do you hear her song in the air?  
A still small hymn to her smallness,  
It is your own voice there.  
Never again are you lonely,  
Though the mist close down like a pall.  
Singing her song together,  
One friendship binds us all.

May our hearts be filled with Norway,  
'Till we sleep on our mother's breast.  
The quiet of her summer night-time  
Is the haven and home of her rest.  
May our hearts be filled with Norway,  
In the power and the pride of the free.  
Spread the swell of our sail to her storm-wind,  
Then out for the open sea!

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# MENTO

"Why should it be a matter of wonder that the dead  
should come back? The wonder is that they do not."  
MRS. OLIPHANT. *A Beleaguered City.*

### I. ONE UP ON SAM

DOCTOR JOHNSON, who provided me with the quotation that launches my prelude to this book (and therein consigned a very satisfying proportion of modern literature to the limbo it deserves), was once asked what he considered the highest possible point of human happiness. He replied, rather unexpectedly, "Driving very fast in a post-chaise beside a pretty woman".

I know it is presumptuous to challenge any of the great Samuel's judgments, but I cannot help thinking that I went one better than him when I rode on horseback beside a pretty woman to the great Castle of Krak des Chevaliers.

It has no particular connection with Kerak of Moab, which is also mentioned in the prelude. It is a good deal more accessible, though to reach it from Beirut, we had to meet before daybreak and take a hired car along the coast-road that leads to Tripoli. We had passed the Dog-River, and the conqueror's monuments that adorn its cliffs, before it was fully light. Our first stop was at Jebail of the many names. It is, in itself, one of the most charming little towns, and it is so rich in every sort of relic as to be a kind of miniature history of the Near East. It appears in very early Egyptian records as Ken, and Herodotus, who knew it under the name of Byblos 1500 years ago, listed it then as the oldest city in the world. It was almost certainly built when Tyre and Sidon were uninhabited islands.

On one side of it lie the foundations of three Egyptian Temples, of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms, the first, maybe, 2000 years older than the last. Near these are countless Phœnician tombs, and some ruins of Greek building. There is a miniature Roman theatre, still inviting one to put on special performances of highbrow plays for the restricted audience that the few seats would accommodate. All this can be viewed from the tower of the Crusaders' Castle, which

they called Gibelet. To sit there, in pleasant company, amid cool morning breezes, to munch rolls and drink hot coffee from a thermos, and not be too pedantic about the dates and details of the archaeological feast that was spread between the walls of our castle and the rocks where blue waves broke white—this was the happiest way of beginning a very happy day.

We had not the time to stroll down the cheerful and unusually clean little market, nor to visit the twelfth-century church, still a church and never perverted to use as a Muslim mosque. I had been there before, to a children's service late on a Saturday night: I shall not easily forget the picture of the little folk grouped round the very old man in a beautifully embroidered vestment. On the flagstones at their feet stood a hurricane lamp, the only light in the building, and it cast the most weirdly dancing shadows upon the clustered pillars and the vaulting of the distant roof.

But it was morning now, and we were in some haste to reach our horses; we could only glance at the church from afar as we regained our car, empty thermos in hand, and ordered full speed ahead for Tripoli.

The inland road had not yet been built and we had to pass through the tunnel high up on Chekka Cliff, where Fighting French guards peered at our passports, and machine-guns grinned down the echoing tube of road. We emerged to see Tripoli from afar, and were soon eating a more substantial breakfast in the comfortable if unromantic atmosphere of the Officers' Club.

Tripoli was actually the birthplace of that ultra-romantic person, Mélisande, the *Princesse Lointaine* of Browning's lyric and Rostand's play. It was a large town in her days, but little is left of its former grandeur except a huddle of old streets just beneath the mouldering castle. The modern, seaward parts are laid out in open avenues, radiating from an absurd little clock-tower-kiosk which tells you the time aloft and sells you, below, newspapers and Penguin Specials. We did not stop to buy either. Today we were not for books; we were for Tell Kalakh and the horses that awaited us there.

They proved to be an odd and ill-trained pair of animals, saddled and bridled with Oriental picturesqueness and inefficiency. My friend's mount soon showed a tendency to bolt with her over hard ground, dangerously strewn with boulders; and the danger was greatly increased by a stirrup-strap snapping at the most critical moment. We were riding at the time with an Arab we had picked



up on the way, and he restrained me from my natural (but worse than useless) instinct to gallop off after her in the hope of giving help. The result of any such attempt would have been to spur the bolting horse to further exertions and probably to calamity. I had the unenviable duty of trotting quietly along and watching someone for whose safety I felt responsible (at least for the day) disappear in a cloud of dust with only one stirrup in use. Luckily her housewoman's instinct was sufficient to save her and bring her runaway to a halt before he had injured himself or her.

We had, for the most part, a less exciting but an exhilarating three hours in which to look about us and thank God we were not making the usual cramped and bumpy crawl in a motor car, over a poor apology for a road, which puts most visitors in exactly the wrong mood for appreciating Krak des Chevaliers.

As one approaches it from the south, the first distant view is inevitably a disappointment. One sees merely a shapeless discoloration jutting up from a hill. Riding as we did over slopes which no car could tackle, we lost sight of the castle by descending twistily to the track. This runs along the edge of Al Buq'ia, a little plain of comparatively green pasture. We reached it at a turn where there is a large, solitary, and most English-looking tree. Here Beduin Arabs had pitched their black-and-white patchwork tents. They look untidier, from outside, than the worst pseudo-gipsy encampment in an English dell. But I am told that, inside, every pan and knife has its traditional position, from which, when the order to strike camp is given, it can be taken and packed in the right place, on the right camel's back, with a despatch and regularity that make British Army Routine look like the fumbblings of an amateur picnic.

We were soon climbing again, among pebbles and boulders, up the blind side of further hills. We clattered through the narrow valleys of a village and so came out beneath our goal, well able to appreciate its full immensity and grandeur.

I cannot but think of Krak des Chevaliers as the prince of all castles. Nothing I have seen in Europe can compete in size, site or atmosphere with the vast structures that are scattered up and down the Near East. Of these, Cypriot St. Hilarion must take the prize for fantasy and fairylike wonder. Marqab is as large, and far more magnificently perched. Beaufort, too, has a wonderful site, on one side at least, looking down an almost sheer precipice of 900 feet to the rushing torrent of the Leontes: but the approach from the hinter

plateau is not so impressive and the building itself disappointing. I have already spoken of the lonely ruin above Banias, and it is no more than a ruin. Krak's closest rival is perhaps Sahyûn, which I did not see till Christmas. It has an ingenious marvel in the moat, a fine situation, and a wealth of interesting buildings that still stand inside its huge perimeter. But these places are dead relics, museum-pieces, compared with Krak des Chevaliers. It is astonishingly well-preserved, and even the most unhistorically-minded tourists have spoken of the unique thing about it—the feeling that life is still going on, the feeling that one has only to turn a corner to find a section of its large garrison (it once housed 3000 men) eating or sleeping or at work.

We left our ruffianly-looking horses in charge of the even more ruffianly-looking Arabs who lounged and chattered at the gate: officialdom has unfortunately erected an iron barrier to prevent one riding up the sloping vaulted corridor (there are few stairways in Krak of the Horsemen) which leads up to the stables. We immediately began to get that queer sensation that we were entering an inhabited building, in the multitudinous rooms and quiet courtyards of which some unseen, orderly human activity was still going on. I summarized it by saying, 'Old Chevaliers never die', but I felt that the flippancy was a little out of tune with my surroundings.

One is no doubt influenced by the completeness of everything, and by the wonderful state of its preservation—the store-rooms with their shelves for bottles of olive-oil and bins for grain, the kitchen where a good army cook could cook for a modern battalion: the ascetic, nonconformist-looking little chapel (into which, again, the Muslims have thrust a painted pulpit): the council chamber—'committee room' as we should call it: the dining-hall, and pantry and 'usual offices'. But I do not think that this is the only thing which is at work upon the mind.

It is to be remembered that the building as it now stands was not the seat of some rascally border-baron, with no aim in life except to increase his security, his self-esteem and his income. It was not even a government institution, directed by a royal nominee and garrisoned by such nondescripts as the king of Jerusalem could find cash to pay. It was the international headquarters of a highly organized body, the Order of the Knights Hospitallers, whose members had devoted their lives to the highest public service which their times recognized. They had taken the three vows of Obedience, Poverty and Chastity.

Racial types in the surrounding villages suggest that their observance of the third vow was not as strict as it might have been, and no doubt there were breaches of the other two, reluctance to carry out orders and occasional lootings on the sly. But the men who were chosen to guard Krak would be of somewhat higher type than their fellows. They lived under a very considerable discipline, daily masses and practice in arms being varied with observance of fasts as well as festivals. And they were taught to have no roots, hardly any connections, in any other place, but to regard the castle as their only home on earth. I cannot but think that such a life as they led might stamp itself upon the place with such quiet insistence as to survive the passage of centuries.

The scientists and philosophers tell us that nothing once created can ever die. Perhaps it is not entirely romanticism or superstition which looks for remnants of what was once tremendously alive among the walls and arches which formerly fathered and sheltered it. If such speculation seems a trifle misplaced among the practicalities and conveniences of modern life, I would like to ask doubters to visit Krak themselves before they pass final judgment. And they will enjoy their trip better if they make it on horseback—suitably accompanied.

We were in no mood for solemnities or philosophizings as we emerged from the sloping passages into the sunlight of the upper courtyard. We even contemplated a bathe in the moat which guards the inmost ring of fortification, but we were discouraged by the film of curdled green which had settled on the water. It was never, I believe, used for drinking purposes, as the castle contains 18 wells. We climbed up again with a packet of tomato sandwiches, and a thermos replenished at Tripoli, to find a good place for a picnic amongst the topmost towers.

The actual summit was too windy for a comfortable lunch, so we spread our bringings on the window-sill of the room immediately below. It is believed to be the Master's lodgings. One window looked southward to the butt end of the Lebanon range—incidentally its highest spot and the best centre for ski-ing and winter sports. By craning leftwards and eastwards we could see the low hills that mark the dull town of Homs. But we had to climb the short stairway again, after our brief meal, in order to look from the windswept platform above, to the Alawite mountains that lie immediately north, and the whole blue stretch of the Mediterranean which marks the western horizon.

There is nothing except platforms on the towers and walls. Krak was presumably built when the science of machicolation was in its infancy. The projecting battlements must have been run out, in woodwork, on a kind of gallery, which rested on the massive stone corbels that still project level with the platform. Through spaces in the floor of this gallery, the defenders could shoot or drop missiles vertically downward on an enemy picking at the base of the wall, while they themselves remained in safety behind its wooden parapet. In later castles, the whole arrangement was, of course, reproduced in stone, giving the poets a right to speak of 'frowning' towers. In Krak it was timber, and has vanished, leaving only the unfenced masonry of the towers themselves, and the jutting corbels which once supported the fighting gallery. But so solid is that masonry that on the highest point it was difficult to believe that we were standing on a man-made building rather than on the virgin rock of a mountain.

A castle called Husn-al-Akrad, the Kurds' Castle, stood on the same site before ever there was an Order of the Hospital. Its duty was to watch all the roads and tracks leading inland from the coasts about Tripoli, through the gap that separates the Lebanon from the Alawite mountains. From the extra height which the Hospitallers' structure gave him, the Master certainly commanded a view of every route, and could send out his patrols in time to intercept any passers-by of whom he disapproved.

His northward prospect, to the Alawite hills, must have given him much food for reflection. They were dotted with the strongholds of the Assassins, whose leader went by the picturesque title of the Old Man of the Mountains. Of their origin in Persia I shall have a word to say later. Here in Syria they were most often allies of the Crusaders (somewhat unreliable as well as discreditable allies), being Ismaili heretics detested by the rest of the Muslims. Their method was to send out half-crazy young fanatics to murder selected victims among those who were highly placed in any State city or organization which was opposed to them. The policy of the Old Man of the Mountains was so tortuous and uncertain that there was no telling whether, one dark night, he might not be sending a young man to Krak to stick his knife into the ribs of his friend the Master of the Hospital.

He is said to have maintained the discipline and fanaticism of his organization by the liberal use of hashish. Indeed the drug was given its name to the Society, 'Assassins' being merely Hashashin. The

Old Man of the Mountains seems to us now as remotely unreal as an ogre in a fairy-tale: he was once as actual and as sordid as a Chicago gang leader. His former domains are as busy as ever with the growing and smuggling of hashish, and the trade entails a certain amount of murder, though not on the old grand and systematic scale. A convicted trafficker once told me that one of the passwords still in use is 'There is snow upon the mountains'. And, as he spoke, there was a curious ring in his voice which made me feel I was catching an echo from forgotten centuries of evil.

There was every temptation for us to linger on the Master's Tower, to remember and speculate and wonder. But daylight is a limited commodity, and we had had a long ride to Tell Kalakh, a long car drive home. We had to make our devious way down and round the castle, I for one wishing that we had weeks rather than minutes in which to study and understand the scientific intricacies which so long defied the siegecraft of Islam. But the best of days must come to an end at some time, and I had already had more enjoyment than any man has a right to expect in twelve hours.

Our two horses were waiting for us at the great gate. The ride back was as good as the approach, and not so chequered with emergencies. The sun, which we had seen rise between the Dog River and Jebail, was low down in the sky before we trotted into Tell Kalakh. But never once since we had left the village that morning, had I come to envy Sam Johnson either his post-chaise or his company.

## II. INDEPENDIBLE

I HAD now passed two years in Arabic-speaking countries and knew less Arabic than when I first stepped off the ship at Suez. I had cursed my own ignorance often enough, but none of my efforts to repair it had had any effective result.

Curiously enough the alphabet had stuck in my mind and I could still make Arabs laugh by signing a rough equivalent of my untranslatable name even if I had to borrow two Persian letters to do it.

اقت جوت صويست

Perhaps the unique beauty of the script attracts me. It is so much easier to learn and remember what is attractive.

I do not suppose that after the first few weeks (which must inevitably be weeks of blank despair) the learning of enough Arabic to carry on an ordinary conversation is a task of any overwhelming difficulty. Some of the syntax is childishly simple. It has frequently been noticed that the ordinary British soldier soon picks up enough of the language to get about with, and satisfy his needs. It is only the Intelligence Officer who has to own himself beaten (perhaps through trying to master too many intricacies) by the moods of the verbs and the absolutely rule-less plurals which give you *Shaionk* for Shaikhs, *Umra* for 'Amirs', and *Khulfawat* for Khalifs.

After repeatedly filling my head with such complications and watching them trickle out again as from the proverbial sieve, I had now reached a point where I expected to be called away at any moment, taken skyward and left to float down upon some country where Arabic would be of no more use to me than Chinese. I hoped it might be Greece, and there were several other converging reasons why it might prove worth my while to acquire some knowledge of modern Greek.

At forty, one approaches any new language with some misgiving. The power to memorize quickly and accurately is far weaker than it is at fourteen: the pleasure I certainly felt as a child at mastering the crossword-puzzle variations of grammar had given way to a distaste for what now seems drudgery.

I had a pleasant surprise. I found the preliminaries interesting, and the subsequent grind far less tedious than I had expected. Within two months I was reading Greek newspapers with some intelligence, and understanding simple Greek spoken to me with reasonable slowness. If I still felt tongue-tied, there were certain subjects on which I could discourse in inaccurate but intelligible Greek.

Of course, it was no new language I was studying. People had told me that the half-forgotten ancient Greek I had learned at school would be of no service to me in learning the modern tongue. I soon found, as I had suspected at the time, that they had been talking through their hats. I incidentally discovered how magnificently I had been taught at school: half-forgotten things soon began to crowd back into my mind from the unconscious depths in which their foundations had been well and truly laid. The alphabet I had never forgotten. The words which came welling up provided me with

three-quarters of my vocabulary for modern Greek, some changed a little in form but easily recognizable, others not changed at all. And the grammar was mainly an easily-mastered simplification of the ancient subtleties.

There are so many kinds of speech in modern Greece (from the half classical style of official documents to the colloquialisms of street and village) that it is difficult to make any firm generalization. But, by and large, I should make bold to say that the ancient tongue has survived to a degree little short of the miraculous. In spite of such long subjection to foreign masters as England has not known, in spite of more contact and intermingling with a dozen races of barbarously different speech, I would say that the Greeks have changed their language less in the twenty-three centuries since Plato—certainly less in the nineteen centuries since St. Paul—than we have in the short six since Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales*.

Perhaps a miracle was to be expected. Ancient Greek may or may not have been a beautiful language. I hardly know what people mean by the term, especially when they can only guess vaguely how it was pronounced; I only know that, to a hearer who knows neither language, it is far easier to make Virgil's Latin hexameters sound melodious than Homer's staccato and guttural Greek ones. But, beautiful or not, there has surely never been a language so agile, so clear, and so perfectly adapted to convey fine shades of meaning as that which Euripides and Socrates spoke. It is understandable that Greece, having forged so unique an instrument of human communication, should have preserved so much of it in defiance of Time and of human tyrants.

Early in this book I damned myself as a reactionary by suggesting that I saw merits in a classical education. I am certainly not going to champion my unfashionable opinion on the meagre ground that it enables a man to learn modern Greek more easily in his later life. It would be more pertinent to point out that a knowledge of Latin halves the difficulties of learning French, Spanish, Italian, and, for that matter, Roumanian, while it gives a good line of approach to the irritating intricacies of German grammar and the simpler structure of the three Scandinavian tongues. But if I am to put up a defence of what so many people now regard as indefensible, I would choose very different ground for fighting out the battle.

I recently made a long train journey, from Beirut to Cairo, opposite a stranger who seemed at first to be an uncompromising modernist.

Knowing nothing of my views, he launched into an unprovoked attack on the 'snobbery' of those who were trying to perpetuate the teaching of Greek and Latin in our schools. I refused to be drawn, since he was not the type of man with whom one can profitably argue. But I asked him a few questions in order to discover the basis of his own general views on Education. He soon revealed that he held the very sensible opinion that the soundest and most practical education was one which trained a child to use Words (the commonest of all tools, the instruments which we must be using every hour of the day, in order to carry on any kind of business), and to use them in as accurate and unambiguous a manner as possible. He proceeded to say that the best way of doing this was to teach pupils to make translations between their own language and another, as different from it as could be in structure and atmosphere. Only so, he said, could they grasp the realities that words so haltingly express. Then, waving aside all the practical, the practically insurmountable difficulties of finding enough expert teachers (or any body of literature, which could possibly interest an English child), he decreed that the schools of England should at once proceed to teach their pupils classical Arabic. He had been studying it himself, in his long leisure hours at a remote frontier post; and his attitude to those who had never had such an opportunity struck me as the rankest intellectual snobbery.

It seems to me most unscientific to begin an enquiry on Education by ignoring the conclusion of all those generations of men who had practical and lifelong experience in teaching boys between the Renaissance and our own century. They deduced from it that Greek and Latin were useful instruments for the purpose. It is still more unscientific to ignore the obvious fact that the vast majority of children are certain to forget three-quarters of what they learn at school, within a few years of leaving it. It hardly matters what they are taught. What matters is whether the teaching leaves them with minds that are in any sense *trained*—minds competent to tackle the many and obvious trades into which they will have to enter, minds that will be able to make an intelligent approach to the hundred unforseeable questions, social, political and economic, which an unknown future may present to the human race. My own experience persuades me that those who have even a smattering of the classics—however wearisome to acquire, however easy to forget—possess minds at least partially trained. They are rudimentarily enabled to develop the one faculty which has been well cited as the touchstone



of education, the faculty of knowing a good argument from a bad one. It also persuades me that other systems of education, however plausible and attractive to their own advocates, leave the majority of young minds in a chaos of uncorrelated facts and of enthusiasms doomed to disappointment.

It would be interesting to calculate what percentage of the most important discoveries of modern Science have been made by men originally educated in the Classics. It is amusing to recall that Darwin originally sat down to write his *Origin of Species* in Latin. In his day it was still the *lingua franca* for all men of science and learning. We have now lost it, and Esperanto seems to be very slow in taking its place. And yet we are daily told how dire is our need for a universal language if we are to save civilization from disaster!

There are many other grounds on which a classical education can be defended, but I have only space for one more. It is this—that it enables the majority of young people to get a vague contact (and a very important minority of them to achieve intimate communion) with some of the keenest and profoundest brains that our species has yet produced.

I cannot here deal adequately with the not very intelligent question, 'But why not in translation?' There is only one answer, but it is never acceptable to the questioner. It is this—'Go away and learn Greek. Read Plato and Thucydides in their own language. Then tell me, if you dare, that you have learned nothing that you could not learn from your translations.'

Those who have learned French and studied the best French thinkers and writers will bear me out by saying they have entered a new world to which no translator could ever have introduced them. Those who have learned enough simple Greek to read St. John's Gospel in the original and have sat listening to the follies and sentimentalities of one of those parsons who can only read it in Jacobean English, will know what I mean. Even business men who have employed some of the most expensive translation bureaux for their communications with foreign firms will probably realize that they have been playing a kind of blind-man's-buff, and that a man of lower-grade intelligence who knows the two languages in question can tweak the principal players, who know only one, in a dozen unintended directions.

It seems to me of first-class importance that the really great philosophers and political thinkers of Greece and Rome should not be so

miscoloured and misrepresented by a small band of expert linguists, such as those who are now publishing, unchecked and uncheckable, little popular manuals for the misguiding of our reading and voting public. It seems to me that it would be far healthier if there were still a largish class of Civil Servants, professional and business men, such as existed 30 years ago who had a superficial but a sufficient acquaintance with the classics; they were able to pin down, and discount, the intrusion of unconscious propaganda, and to draw their own inexpert but common-sense conclusions from the controversies of the experts.

Such a class used to provide an effective tribunal, before which international problems could be argued out, on grounds not entirely restricted to the passing hour, and in an atmosphere seasoned by the wisdom of the whole evolving race. Without such a class, a large community can be easily tricked with devices that were already threadbare when Aristophanes ridiculed them, or inoculated with superstitious enthusiasms on which Tacitus could have made some grim epigram. It is for lack of this that civilization is now threatening to collapse altogether, leaving us all to starve for want of co-operation or cut each other's throats in mutual misunderstanding.\*

When in my twenties I first began to grasp the complexities of modern social and political problems, I used to wonder why I had been so largely trained in the thought-scheme of a vanished world. Experience has slowly taught me that this reaction of mind was hasty and superficial. I have learned that in most human problems there is a hard core untouched by Time, by material circumstances or by the dazzling triumphs of mechanical invention. Our behaviour in the mass is still recognizably similar to that of their predecessors. And I am glad to have been brought in touch in my schooldays with all that the most powerful minds yet known to us have thought and recommended on the subject of that behaviour.

We travel by aeroplane now, instead of by horse or galley. We can accurately predict the multiplication of invisible microbes or the impact of impalpable waves upon the ether. Yet we are still taken off our guard by the most elementary political reactions of human masses. We have abandoned the scientific study that our grandfathers gave to such matters. When defeat, depression and un-

\* I once asked a young German Liberal what was the main cause of Hitler's success in hoodwinking his countrymen. He replied unhesitatingly, "The decay of classical education".

employment raise a Hitler to power, we cannot recognize in him (admittedly on a far larger scale) a phenomenon which the Greeks had labelled 'Turannos'. We have now put the word 'tyrant' to quite other uses. Its Greek prototype is untranslatable, unless our word 'upstart' can be held to cover all the illegalities and brutalities of Hitler's career. We have still further confused our thought by a hopeless misapplication of the Latin term 'dictator', which originally meant a constitutionally elected and most temporary official, not an autocrat who had seized power by such unlawful methods as Mussolini's, and means to hold on to it until someone assassinates him. The muddle in terminology is of course utterly unimportant, except in so far as it accompanies muddled thought and ineffective action. But the latter threaten disaster to the world.

Faced with the Italian and German autocrats, we made the excuse that we were up against something quite new in the history of the world, instead of recognizing that it, or something curiously like it, had been well known and well hated 2000 years ago. Everything that happens is in some sense new, but only in the sense that it is a fresh combination of old and well-investigated elements. We are both shocked and astonished at sudden outbreaks of political atrocities in times of tension and idealism. A little study of the French Revolution would lessen our astonishment. But if we wish to make a really scientific survey of the matter, we should begin our researches with Thucydides. After a close study of a two-halfpenny revolution in Corcyra (Corfu as we now call it) he concluded that sudden political changes had always produced similar horrors. And he adds prophetically that they were likely to go on doing so as long as men were men. And if the reader desires Thucydides' opinion on another modern problem, the policy of Appeasement, he will find it in Pericles' Speech on the Megarian Decrees, summarized by one sufficient sentence, 'If you yield this point to them, you will immediately be ordered to yield another and a greater one, as having conceded the first point through fear'.

When we have stopped talking rhetorically about breaking the dead fetters of the past, we may remember that the dead have possibly some counsel and help to offer us, and that, if they cannot often come back to give it in person, they have at least left much of it in their books, for such of us as can take the trouble to read them.

The whole theme requires long hours to discuss and long years to ponder and examine. I cannot spare more time for it. I must get

back to a rather pleasant office in Beirut where a cheerful little Greek from Alexandria sat with me for a nominal hour a day (generally for much longer), laughed gaily at my frequent mispronunciations of his language, and frowned over my written exercises, in which correctly modern phrases were interspersed with others which had hardly been heard in Athens since St. Paul tried to persuade its inhabitants not to worship an unknown god.

### III. GRÆCULUS

My little tutor spent most of his day juggling with chemicals at the dispensary of the American University, but he kept a bright bird's eye open for human mixtures as well as for the comicalities of life and language.

He was a member of a fairly large Greek community in Beirut, and showed some of the tireless energy of his race by sitting on committees and helping it to manage its affairs. One of my methods of learning his language was to translate into it a one-act play I had written long ago, and had recently seen re-published in a Penguin anthology. This flattering activity naturally sweetened much drudgery and turned it into a labour of love, even if it was only the self-love of a conceited playwright.

We had many good laughs together. One cannot learn another language (and so enter another world) without encountering some new kinds of joke. Most of them are uncommunicable, or shall I repeat myself and say untranslatable? I doubt if I can communicate my amusement at discovering that the Greeks have dropped the old word *hippas* for 'horse' and substituted *To Alogo*, which means literally 'the unreasonable thing'. It seems to me an undeserved libel on a long-suffering animal. I am sure that the species of *Equus Caballus* finds the species of *Homo Sapiens* at least equally unreasonable.

One could not perhaps expect such a country as Greece, where Cavalry has seldom been a decisive arm, to preserve a great tradition of horsemanship, especially after the Turks had killed off the majority of its cavaliers and reduced the rest to serfdom. But there are two other foundations upon which a nation may build and maintain greatness, the mountains and the sea. The Greeks have never lacked men who are at home on both, and can use both to be the bane of oppressors, whether Turkish, Italian or German. They still have

mountaineers to match the men who were trained on the rocky slopes above Sparta and died in the pass of Thermopylæ: they still have seamen who have faced perils and monsters with as much courage, energy, and ingenuity as ever Odysseus showed.

Indeed, their worst enemies, in all ages, have accused them of too much rather than too little energy and ingenuity: and I have noticed among the British officers who are most unsympathetic and most impatient of their other faults, that there is no disposition whatever to deny their courage. Their defeat of the Italian Armies in the mountains of Albania, when comparative numbers and armament are taken into account, remains one of the greatest military achievements of this war. One Greek who played some part in it told me of the high exhilaration of those days, when the whole people was so gloriously united, and intent on achieving its apparently impossible purpose. It was just two years later when he described it to me, and he had only to spread his hands and say, "And look at us now!"

But disunion among exiles and *émigré* armies is not peculiar to the Greeks. Others, who have done less valiantly and suffered less disaster, have provided a sorrier spectacle for the watching world. We have little right to pass judgment on any of our Allies; too many of them are now suffering from the weakness and folly of those English politicians who ruled our own still inviolate country—by our consent—through 20 degenerate years. We have, perhaps, least right of all to pass judgment on the Greeks. I speak as one who has had some contact with them since childhood, and knew Englishmen who fought with them against the Turks as far back as 1912. I am not interested in irritable accusations levelled against them by those who have known their exiles for a few months in the Middle East. And I notice that such accusations, like similar ones against the French, seldom come from those who have fought beside them in battle.

#### IV. DEAD SEA FRUIT

WE are all slaves of Time, in spite of Mr. J. W. Dunne's efforts to free us from its chains, and in spite of the rather more convincing enfranchisement that one can derive from the experiences of the Misses Moberly and Jourdain at Versailles.\* If you are too completely in its thralldom, you may have been slightly confused by the

\* *An Adventure*, Faber & Faber, republished in 1940.

way this book began. It has taken a more orderly course since then, and has now arrived at the point when I was sent on a few days' business from Beirut to Jerusalem, played truant to Kerak of Moab, and wrote my prelude in the guardroom of the Al Misra Fort.

I must now tell you what happened after I had eaten the fried eggs in my fingers and ridden my white horse down to the Dead Sea.

Actually, nothing happened for a long time. No boat came into sight on the silver expanses before me. I sat on the landing-stage, or stumped up and down the foreshore, and wondered whether the Palestine Potassium Company had failed to get my telegram, or whether this was one of the nights when it sent no tug and barges up the sea with a load destined for Jerusalem.

Somewhat before 4 o'clock in the morning, I attracted the attention of the Arabs who were encamped near-by, and they invited me to take coffee with them. Before taking, one must make. The process whiled away about an hour. They roasted and pounded and cursed it and coerced it. They heated it, set it to cool, and then heated it again. They finally emptied it into a pot, and poured out for me a small thimbleful of the bitterest and nastiest liquid I have ever tasted. I need hardly say that the 'they' refers to the womenfolk, most of whom did not even get a thimbleful of their own product to taste. The men, after much smacking of lips, rolled themselves up in blankets and went to sleep.

They were still lying there like logs on the foreshore at 6 o'clock, when I despaired of my boat and made up my mind to walk southward, round the end of the sea, to the headquarters of the Potash Company. I only had a tiny scale map of the whole of Palestine, and I reckoned it as about 20 miles. Unfortunately small-scale maps cannot show all the barriers and twistings that may be encountered, especially where land has been inundated for chemical purposes. It must have been nearer 40 miles. I have in my time walked 50 within the twenty-four hours, but not in summer, in Transjordan, in an airless oven nearly 2500 feet below sea level.

It was reasonably fresh when I started, and there were green things round me, growing so high as to obscure the Dead Sea from me and so prevent me (as I afterwards learned) from seeing the arrival of the Potash boats at the Al Misra landing-stage at about 6.30 a.m. But it was soon hot enough to be unpleasant, and my path led along shores that became more rocky and arid at every stage. There was no chance whatever of any shade from the burning sun.

There are some things in this book which might lead readers to suspect that I am one of those who go about hankering for past ages, and wishing they had been born in any century but their own. It is not so. I am well aware that I live in one of the most interesting periods of the world's history, and, looked at in the right way, one of the most inspiring. I am particularly glad that I did not have to pass my Time in the East 50 years ago when everyone was fussing about sunstroke, and burdening soldiers with topces, neck-shields and other absurdities. The 8th Army has now run around Libya for three years in side-caps or bare heads, and no single case of sunstroke has yet been reported. The doctors have found other fads now, and have ceased to make us all dance to the tune that naturally rejoiced the hearts of the hat and cap manufacturer. Until my walk from Al Misra I had not worn anything in the East except the side-cap which covers about half the head and none of the neck.

This somewhat wordy digression is merely preface to the fact that on this walk I did feel the sun a trifle hot on my head, and so far unpacked my haversack as to get out my pyjamas and wind them into a kind of turban.

I benefited a little by the change. I also benefited by the unexpected fact that, every three miles or so, a mountain stream crossed my path, bubbling down to the Dead Sea. I lay full length in each, drinking in as much as I could find room for, and getting my clothes well soaked. Each time they were dry again within a few minutes, and I was licking parched lips, scanning the gaunt cliffs on my left for signs of another watercourse.

Noon came and passed. I had been walking six hours and still seemed a long way from my goal. I do not know how long I should have taken to reach it unaided, or if the heat and glare would finally have decided me to surrender, to turn up my toes and die; but I think that the coming of night would have altered this drastic resolve and made it possible to carry out my original plan, on rather belated lines.

I was never faced with the necessity. Early in the afternoon, I looked ahead through the heat-haze and saw five fellow-creatures approaching—my first for many hours. They were three horses and two troopers of the Arab Legion. It appeared that my hosts of last night had made kindly enquiries from the Arabs of Al Misra, drawn the correct deduction, and telephoned southwards to their next post:

they reported that a mad English captain was trying to walk round the Dead Sea at midday.

When we descried each other and came close, there was no trace of surprise or disapproval on the faces of the two troopers. They did not even appear to notice that I had wrapped a pair of yellow pyjamas round my head. I swung myself up, still turbaned, into the saddle of the horse they had brought for me. Its leather surface had been grilling for some time in the sun, and the contact at first made me wish that I was the 'James Winterbottom Esq' of the ribald limerick. But I was now glad of any kind of seat, and when my companions broke out into the monotonous kind of dirge to which the act of riding always seems to prompt the Arab race, I gave them my perfectly tuneless version of *Annie Laurie* and *Speed Bonny Boat* by way of reprisal.

We had a meal, and an excellent one, at a very lonely-looking farmhouse near the south-east bend of the Sea. It was evidently more than a farm, for the most unexpected stores (boxes of crystalized fruit and tablets of scented soap wrapped in cellophane) were constantly appearing from drawers and cupboards of immemorial rusticity. I had clearly been brought to the Selfridges of the district, though I was far from clear where it found any customers for its far-fetched luxuries.

The telephone had been busier than I knew. Before we had finished eating, the oldest, rustiest and most perilous-looking motor car I have ever seen bumped into the farmyard with half its entrails missing and the rest trailing along the track. It brought with it a most polite and friendly representative of the Palestine Potash Company. He invited me to take a seat in his contraption and come with him to headquarters for an evening meal and a rest, so as to catch the next midnight boat which would take me a long way towards Jerusalem.

I finished my meal, made the *faux pas* of offering to pay for it, said good-bye to my fellow-songsters and cavaliers and was handed over from Arab to Jewish hospitality. It was amusing, and yet a little saddening, to watch the icily correct courtesy with which the representatives of the two races addressed each other, and feel the hostility that only too clearly lay beneath it.

I climbed into the skeleton of what had once been a motor-car and was soon being whirled along lanes where I could never have found my way unguided, and across the complicated pattern of dikes



that separated lagoons and potash-pans from my morning's goal.

The machine certainly worked, and its apparent outward decrepitude was no foretaste whatever of the welcome that awaited me at the factory. There all was slick and modern, spick and span. I was given a room to myself and a bed to doze on, for the few hours that I was staying. A most excellent dinner was cooked, apparently for my sole benefit. The place is used in winter as a warm refuge for the chilled inhabitants of Jerusalem, but in early September I had it to myself.

I also had a very gingerly bathe. I remembered my idiotic header from the Al Misra jetty, and was careful to keep my head well above the level of the super-salted water. Then I got stickily back into my clothes and took a short walk beneath the rocks that bound the Dead Sea along most of its western shore.

I saw a little more of them by moonlight, as we plugged our way out of the little harbour. But I was tired enough to be soon seeking my comfortable bunk. I slept like a log until late next morning, when we reached the northern end of the Sea. Thence I sped by car from the Jordan valley and up to the heights of Jerusalem. I regained that lovely city with the feeling that I had learned a lot since I had left it at dawn in a post-lorry. I had learned something from the sting of salt in my throat, much from the impact of sun on a bare or a pyjama-ed head, and a great deal from the mental exercise of trying to write a prologue by inadequate lamplight.

#### V. GILBERTIAN

It did not take me long to regain Beirut, where there was still work to be done, still modern Greek to be learned, and a summons to be awaited.

I had not much time to await it. I soon heard that the whole venture for which I had volunteered had been cancelled and called off. I was told that Authority at Headquarters had made a note of my name, and would keep an eye open for any chance of sending me to more active service. But I have had too many notes made of my name, and heard too often of eyes kept open on my behalf, to pay much heed to such promises. It was wiser to content myself with being what most men of my age and standing were, and to dream no more foolish dreams.

It was some little time before I sank back into the slough of self-reproach and depression from which I had climbed out on the hope of adventure. Meanwhile I had a clear brain and an opportunity to take stock of my position and ponder the error of my ways.

There is one error that needs a good deal of pondering, but it is a purely intellectual, not a moral one. One of my motives in volunteering had been a desire to gain such experience as might help me to write better books. I have already observed that most of the world's greatest writers led ostensibly unexciting, often rather humdrum lives. Æschylus fought in battle against the Persians, but most of the great Greeks seem to have had a more sheltered time. Latin and French literatures were mostly written by men of peace and quiet. And, until 1914, our own writers of poetry (apart from Montrose, whose most magnificent lyric contains no mention of war) had not had any experience of danger. One wonders how so many of them contrived to write such good descriptions of battle.

Shakespeare is unlikely to have seen more than tavern-brawls, yet no one has matched some of his pictures of fighting. That excellent and undervalued critic, C. E. Montague, showed how exactly Shakespeare hit off (when the strains of 'Once more into the breach' have died away) the ordinary attitude of the ordinary British Tommy—his grievances and grumbles, his loyalty and tenacity. But Shakespeare is only one conspicuous example of a very curious phenomenon which I suspect to be much commoner than we think. When he is writing about the life he must have known intimately, he produces *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a good stage frolic, but hardly his masterpiece. When he is writing about things of which he can have known little or nothing—the ghosts of dead kings, the remorse of a great general who has seized the crown of Scotland by treachery and political murder, the most intimate relations between a Moorish Commander-in-Chief and his Italian wife—then he is undeniably supreme. I leave the explanation of the riddle to those who are probably more puzzled by it than I. I am quite happy to accept the proposition that imagination is more *real* than experience, and that it is the business of writers to give actuality to a world of fantasy that lies behind and beyond our daily one, rather than to ape 'real' life with a dreary kind of photography.

No man ever died spouting blank verse, let alone rhymed Alexandrines. But that does not mean that *Antony and Cleopatra* or even *Cyrano de Bergerac* would be better plays if they had been written in

workaday prose. One might as well say that Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado* would be a better light opera without any music.

But I must not venture on to the Realism debate, that already overcrowded *pous asinorum* which prevents most Englishmen from having the slightest idea what art and poetry are, even while they are producing both with a copiousness that should make other nations green with envy. The situation is as Gilbertian as that of our Empire, acquired without deliberate policy, without any theoretical Imperialism at all. Not knowing what we were doing, suspecting the Academies and the organized 'Movements' which have made many foreign literatures, we have achieved the greatest literary conquests in history.

We have achieved one that particularly fascinates me. After the Russians (easily ahead of all in this matter) we have best used, though we have perhaps never grasped, the fact that Tragedy and Comedy have deeply intertwined roots which no wise man will long try to hold apart. We have even beaten the Spaniards at this, and left the French, stumbling after some classical mirage, a hundred miles behind. And while we were scoring this and many other literary triumphs, we were producing as much genius as any in the field of Action.

I wish I knew how the two kinds of genius were connected. Apart from Montrose (perhaps the greatest military genius in European history, and author of one of the best of Europe's lyrics) I can see few lives in which the two kinds of supremacy were combined. And yet I am sure that there is some kind of connection between them.

I do not mean that if Napoleon had taken to literature he could have written *Hamlet*. I do not mean that any readjustment of circumstances would have enabled Shakespeare to transform a political chaos like revolutionary France into an aggressive Empire and lead it to innumerable victories in the field. But I feel that the successes which each achieved in his own sphere sprung from some similar vision, some common insight into the Nature of Things, which puts their work into a totally different category from yours or mine.

I said in my prelude that I have met few celebrities. Perhaps those to whom the world accords most worship in their lifetime are best not met. I have not come into contact in the Middle East with any man whose achievements suggest greatness, and if there has been one who may one day be reckoned great, wild horses are not going to drag from me his name, nor the reason why I have here hinted at his existence.

Before I came out here, I had brief personal contact with one who was certainly a celebrity and was no disappointment to meet. If his achievements, his actual output, may not be judged great by posterity, I am convinced that there was more than a germ of greatness in his personality.

The same was true of Walter Scott, whose books have become contemptible to many moderns, though I for one cannot stop reading their apparently unreadable *longueurs*. It is still truer of Dr. Johnson whom the subject of my discourse (would that I could call him my friend) resembled in more ways than one.

Both were portly in body and easy to caricature in literary style; but the modern writer enjoyed being caricatured, enjoyed making fun of his own girth, and even his own stylistic tricks, with a gusto which would have been, I fancy, just beyond the reach of his more touchy eighteenth-century prototype. It was a sad day for England's future, as well as for a few caricaturists, when the elephantine figure of G. K. Chesterton ceased to lumber genially through our land.

I once had the very great honour (I use no empty phrase) of taking tea with Mrs. and G. K. Chesterton at their Beaconsfield home. I had only recently complied with a similar invitation from one whom many people rate higher than Chesterton, though I myself should consider him a far shallower thinker, if a greater master of English Prose. The contrast was marked. At my first tea-party, I sat and listened to an endless stream of praise for my host's most recent (and most rubbishy) works, while their author sat by in bland silence and snuffed up the incense. At Beaconsfield we talked of most things in the world, but not of the works of G.K.C. I was treated as a friend and visitor, not as a potential source of worship and applause. The centre of interest was, very properly, a little girl from a neighbour's house, for whom the great man, while talking a little and listening a lot, was drawing some very funny pictures of Red Indians. And the conversation was punctuated, as by a minute-gun, with my host's deep, rich laughter, surely one of the most heart-warming sounds that has ever echoed in human ears.

Chesterton visited this part of the world soon after the last war. The resultant book, *The New Jerusalem*, contains some extremely entertaining passages, and a few profound and surprising pieces of observation. But there is hardly a book of his about which one could not say the same, and there are many of which one would say far more. I have never met anyone, with or without a knowledge of

the East, who considered it among his best books, and, if one may make a rather superficial criticism, I would say that it contained too little of what he found out here, and too much of what he expected to find and determined to find before he left Beaconsfield. It is a pity to visit any new part of the world with one's mind already made up.

I have said enough (and intend to say more) to show that, whatever my admiration for Chesterton as a thinker, I am not blind to his literary faults. But there is one accusation made against him with which I have no patience at all. He has been constantly attacked as excessively fond of paradox, and it has been further implied that there is something un-English in that fondness. He defended himself against the main charge by saying that he was addressing an audience far too prone to take odd things for granted and allow their sense of wonder, most valuable of human faculties, to "rust in them unused": and that he was writing about an excessively puzzling and even paradoxical world which could no more be described in the sober sequences of logic than a Persian carpet's pattern can be catalogued in terms of Euclid. As for the implication of un-English-ness, it seems to me an astonishing piece of wilful prejudice. Chesterton was surely in the midstream of our national tradition. We have launched at the world a never-ceasing flow of paradox, from Shakespeare's

Virtue itself of Vice must pardon beg,

or

Thou pure impiety and impious purity!

to Lovelace's hackneyed

I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not Honour more!

and Pope's magnificent summing-up of Man's place in a contradictory Universe, sixteen lines of piled paradox, reaching its climax with

Created half to rise, and half to fall,  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all,  
Sole judge of Truth, in endless error hurl'd,  
The glory, jest and riddle of the world!

And after reminding the reader of that top-gallant in England's literary defiance of the Obvious, it is hardly necessary to recall the

quieter twitterings of nineteenth-century breezes in her mizzen-yard.  
Wordsworth's

And he is oft the wisest man  
Who is not wise at all,

or even Tennyson's more familiar

There lives more Faith in honest Doubt. . . .

If anyone's books ever conformed to the Johnsonian standard which I have already quoted, Chesterton may well be said to have written nothing, good or bad, that did not help someone either to enjoy Life or to endure it. I find some patches of his work exceedingly bad, and I think it a major literary disaster that his bold and profound thought was so often couched in a prose style (presumably *corrupted by years of daily journalism*) that can so easily degenerate into a tissue of jingles, exaggerations, inverted proverbs and perverted ingenuities, which is almost more irritating than amusing.

Every now and then it rises to great heights. It often does so, interestingly enough, when Chesterton is tackling the historical theme most pertinent to this book, the struggle between Europe and Asia for the domination of the Mediterranean. As a rule, I greatly prefer Bernard Shaw's disciplined English and even the driving-force that carries him up to his high spots—Blanco Posnet's *final tirade*, or the Cathedral speeches in *Saint Joan*. But there are times when I would sacrifice them all for such splashes of colour and flashes of insight as illumine Chesterton's chapter on the war between Rome and Carthage in that botched masterpiece, *The Everlasting Man*, with its grand rhetoric on Hannibal's army marching to blot out the central city of Europe, and its haunting, homesick close. The same historic inspiration seldom fails to strike fine sparks (such as *Lepanto*) out of his poetry, which will, perhaps, last longer than his prose. His naturally wilful pen accepted the discipline of verse to its great advantage. Chesterton can, indeed, be very funny in his mockery of those to whom Rhyme and Metre are bad masters instead of good servants, in his Swinburnian parody on King Cole's pipe and bowl,

And the lips that were red with the chalice  
Were splendid with smoke.

or his knock-out blow at one of Kipling's less happy moments

... Even as you bowed your head in awe,  
You kicked up both your heels behind  
At lesser breeds without the law;  
Lest they forget, lest they forget,  
'That yours is the exclusive set.

But he had no patience whatever with those who throw on to paper a mess of unintelligible personal reactions and, instead of working up this perhaps-promising matter into a poem, label the undigested stuff *Vers Libre* and toss it at the reader's head with a "Take it or leave it!" Chesterton preferred to leave it, except as a theme for some penetrating gibes. He himself was content to take a little more trouble, and leave us the varied beauties of *The White Horse* and the terse loveliness of *The Donkey*. It is doubtful whether posterity will consider that any other modern poet has surpassed his total achievement.

His prose has been frequently parodied, most brilliantly by Sir Max Beerbohm. His poetry has escaped this compliment or criticism. I once attempted a pastiche in his manner, intending only compliment. I soon found that the resultant verse was a better parody of my own manner than of Chesterton's. If I may beg leave to print it here, it is mainly because of some slight topical, or now historic, interest; and it may also be justified by a reference to a dictum of Napoleon, that interesting but unreliable critic of literature, whose favourite reading seems to have been ghost-stories and the poems of Ossian. He once said that when a man feels deeply he will write well, and when he doesn't he won't. The half-truth may serve as introduction to some lines written under a very considerable emotional pressure, a year or two before the war. I was serving at the time on a Committee whose chief job was the rescue of certain victims from General Franco's tyranny. We were incidentally engaged in combating Fascist propaganda—for instance, the ridiculous story that Guernica had been blown up by the Communists, a story that could only be kept alive by kidnapping the local priest, who had unfortunately witnessed the bombardment by German aeroplanes. I was at the same time irritated by the calm assumption made by some of my Roman Catholic friends that, had G.K.C. been still alive, he would have backed the General against the Republic. We had other Catholics on our anti-Franco Committee. I remembered Chesterton's opinion of the German and Japanese partners in the Axis. I re-

membered his lifelong faith in Liberty and his wide-eyed refusal to accept any kind of comforting falsehood. I felt that the Republic was not far wrong when it dedicated a statue to him in Barcelona—a statue which happily survived the long day-and-a-night bombardment of that city from the air, in which, among other non-military objectives, a schoolful of children was blown to bits. We were unaccustomed to such horrors in those days, as (please God!) we may soon grow unaccustomed to them again. I am as easily moved as most people by news of them, and on this occasion my anger had the following result.

### *COUNTER-PROPAGANDA*

So you're still laughing? Truth was in your laughter,  
Puffing the dust out of our fathers' eyes.  
Let it ring loud for those who follow after,  
Tell them our tale. Tell them that lies are lies.

We do not ask your prayers, as once, for Flanders,  
You prayed with them who fought such foes as we,  
Only your mirth, to prick the bubbling slanders  
That spawn and blister on our agony.

Laugh at their "Red"—their half-lie framed to bate us,  
While Spain ran red with blood to serve their ends,  
The stale, sour trick to make all Europe hate us,  
Make England help her foes against her friends.

So they called China "Red" (whose patient honour  
Upholds a life that ere Christ died was old)  
Because the War-Lords turned slit-eyes upon her,  
The island merchants hankered for her gold.

Laugh at Guernica, laughter cracked with pity,  
... At tortuous tales of spies that Moscow sends  
To set their match to the now blackened city  
That once was dear to Moscow's struggling friends.



## TIME IN THE PAST

You'd not have stooped to lie so, as they're stooping  
Who willed the means, yet wished the work undone,  
Silenced their priest, who saw the Taubes swooping.  
You would have known the heel-mark of the Hun.

And now you've seen them, while the searchlights beckoned,  
Rain down on us their eighteen hours of Death:  
Five hundred children slaughtered in a second:  
Tavern and Church that vanish at a breath.

Nor need the frenzied mother, in her anguish,  
Ask in Whose cause her babe was sacrificed,  
Knowing the blessing on each blade they brandish,  
Knowing each bomb loosed in the name of Christ.

If there are some among us who deny Him,  
(Their wrath for Spain fanning their hate of Rome),  
At least it is not we who sell and buy Him,  
Nor nail His arms across the gutted home.

And if the iron wheel that rolls upon us  
Halts, and then halts again, though none oppose,  
Jester and prophet, cast your mantle on us,  
Whisper what yet might save us from our foes.

Whisper to them that, though our hopes may dwindle,  
Their claims on God creep wide through shattered Spain,  
He is a jealous God. His wrath might kindle  
Against such fools as take His Name in vain.

## CHAPTER NINE

# FARRAGO

" . . . your fairy, which you say is a harmless fairy,  
hath done little better than play the Jack with us."  
*The Tempest.* IV. I. 197.

### I. CAPABLANCA IN MONTIBUS

LIFE had not yet ceased to be full of things that I wanted to do. My long-lasting depression had left me with a number of arrears. I had now, for instance, lived for a year in a town overshadowed by a high mountain, and had not yet made any attempt to climb it.

If we took more leave from Beirut than from Cairo, we were no more punctilious in obeying the order to take one day off a week. It was more like one a month, so that, when it did come, a day and a half did not seem unreasonable.

Work, too, occasionally gave me good reasons, or excuses, for getting out and about. A certain Saturday in autumn found me speeding in an official car from Beirut to a remote mountain village, whence I planned to return to the far side of the Lebanon and so get down to Beirut again on Sunday, like the bear who 'came back over the mountain'.

The official excuse was a good one. We had been told that the wife of one of the villagers now absent, in H.M. forces was being treated stupidly and harshly by local officials. H.M. representative must visit the spot, see if anything was indeed wrong, and if so, have it set right.

I took with me a corporal and a Lebanese interpreter, with whom I had had many good talks about the language and history of his country. He had accompanied me once to the house and grave of Lady Hester Stanhope, that eccentric person who gave up being secretary and London housekeeper to Pitt in order to ride round Syria with the Beduin, become a minor prophetess on the coast of the Lebanon, and die there in lonely poverty and neglect. There had not been much to see in the village that witnessed her end, but I was glad to have seen it.

We flashed past her turning, skirted Sidon, turned left into the hills and followed a mountain road until it overlooked Palestine and became little more than a track. A few yards from our objective, I took pity on the car and got out, to walk up to the village and through its filthy lanes. Muslim villages have the reputation of being dirtier than Christian, and this one was inhabited by Shu'ites, said to be uncleaner than the orthodox Sunni. I will not speculate on the connection between Theology and Sanitation, between Cleanliness and the bewilderingly numerous forms of Godliness that diversify the East. I will merely record that the place stank.

It was far more populous than I expected, and I at first thought that most of its inhabitants were sitting or lounging in the streets. We were seeking the *Mukhtar*, or head man, and when I was introduced to another local celebrity, the village dwarf, I created some amusement by asking if this were he. He was a beady-eyed, rather handsome greybeard about a yard high, with an astonishing wealth of gesture, as rapid and precise as an experienced actor's. He was a more interesting personality than the real *Mukhtar* proved to be.

When we reached the house of the latter, I saw that I had been wrong about the population. Most of it was inside. I have never seen a building so closely packed with humankind. When a passage had been painfully perforated for us through the crowd, and we stood in its centre, I could not help being reminded of pictures I had seen in childhood showing an Oriental house so crowded that a way had had to be made through the roof-tiles in order to let down a sufferer from paralysis into the presence of his Healer.

But here the focus of interest was neither Healer nor Teacher, but a low table covered with money, at which persons were contriving to argue, write and calculate, with rather less elbow-room than they might reasonably expect in their coffins. The Regional Tax Assessor, a sophisticated expert from a neighbouring town, was making his annual visitation. A hundred humble hearts, two hundred hungry eyes, were fixed upon the course of his arguments with the *Mukhtar*.

Space was somehow made to insert a couple of chairs for myself and the corporal. The interpreter somehow found room to sit on the floor. The inevitable little cups of coffee appeared from nowhere. I began with the recognized gambit, an expression of my pleasure in visiting so beautiful a village (I forbore to say 'fragrant'), of my regret that my visit must be so short and formal, of my firm intention to return at leisure some day, when I had more time to appreciate

its delights. My compliments were answered with the usual Oriental courtesy, but I seemed to feel a certain most un-Oriental *consensus* that, with all that money to be argued over, it would be a good thing if I cut the cackle and got down to business.

I did so, and quickly obtained the information I was asking for. Yes, the woman in question had had a hard deal, and her case merited British intervention. Yes, the facts were correct: her acres were few, her husband away, her children many and hungry. Yes, I could rest assured that I was not being misinformed: the *Mukhtar* explained to me (with a charming candour) that the woman and her husband belonged to the village faction with which he himself was at odds: he would be glad enough to put a spoke in their wheels, but in this case, he had to admit that she had been maltreated. And that was that.

I had only to pay a little more flattery to the beauties of the village and accept some, in return, about H.M.'s watchful care over the dependants of his soldiers. I rose to go in an atmosphere of politely concealed relief, leaving the packed house to resume its contentions about the cash.

We regained the car and sped homeward. It was dark before we reached Shtaura, from which I sent car and interpreter back over Mount Lebanon to Beirut. I set out with the corporal on a moonless walk to Zahle, where we planned to spend the night.

My friendship with the corporal originated from turns of night-duty, when we had whiled away the time by playing chess together. He was a more scientific player than me, but easily seduced into my habit of playing too fast—so missing what was to him the slowly crystallized cream of the game. He beat me two games out of three, but was always ready to start again, play too fast again, and give me another beating.

In the intervals of our play we had talked about walking. He was a native of those mid-western shires which are to me the soundest heart of England. Like many typical Englishmen, he had a foreign name, which sounded to me of Norwegian origin. We had discussed walking in Hampshire and Wiltshire and over the Dorset downs. But we had never brought off our schemes for a walk together over Mount Lebanon until this dark night when we found ourselves plodding along the road to Zahle, which was to be our starting place for our Sunday climb up Mount Sannin.

We had intended to get off by 7, but actually started at 7.30. For once, it was the corporal, and not the captain, who was responsible

for the delay. We began by threading our way up Zahle's famous *Wadi*. For fear that the word may call up romantic associations of Beduin bivouacs, I must hasten to add that Zahle is a holiday and gambling resort, and that its *Wadi* consists of about a mile of open-air *cafés* and cabarets, at the tables of which the visitors can discuss cards, women, and the profits to be made from the two industries of the locality (which are smuggling firearms and smuggling drugs). There are no Shaikhs to be seen except the bloated Hollywood ones on the peeling cinema posters. Early on a Sunday morning, the scene was a sordid symbol of all that is most depressing about the Morning After the Night Before.

We were soon clear of this dirty backyard of civilization and soon past the last village where the bell was ringing for service. The valley is Christian; as, unfortunately for the reputation of Christianity, is Zahle itself. But it debouches and looks out on an almost completely Muslim plain called the Beka'a. Our backs were turned to this. We were climbing up and down (but principally up), then down and up again (but now 90% up) till, some time after noon, we emerged upon the wilderness of little peaks called Sannin, the highest point on the southern end of Mount Lebanon.

We had left a tropically sweltering Beirut the day before. We knew we should swelter again that evening. Meanwhile we were between six and seven thousand feet above sea level, and the wind was shrewd and biting. But we sat down in the shelter of a rock, ate some stale remnants of last night's supper, and began a game of chess. We used a pocket-set I had been clumsily carving with a penknife and had fitted into half a cigar box. Some of the pieces stood a little crooked and the bishops, apparently as drunken as the laymen, were not easy to distinguish from the castles. The advantage rested with their carver and creator, but in spite of it the corporal (R.A.S.C.) won one of his usual victories over the captain (Intelligence Corps), to the usual detriment of good order and discipline.

Both in shape and colour, Mount Lebanon is less beautiful than its size and dignity should warrant. Perhaps its Founder intended that its upper slopes should be permanently clothed in cedars, the foothills in pine-forests. The Turk and the goat here defeated His purpose, even if it was not defeated long before by Crusaders or even Romans. It has a few really glorious gorges and valleys, but the *ensemble* is a trifle disappointing. The view from the top of Sannin would no doubt have been magnificent if it had not been obscured

by driving cloud and mist. After one checkmate, we were not tempted to linger.

We came down in a quarter of the time it had taken us to arrive at the summit. The corporal was an enthusiast for ski-ing, at which he had had some practice on the higher, northern end of the Lebanon. He plunged down a long and precipitous slope of shale and stones, as if he had been ski-shod and on snow. He fell over every hundred yards or so, rolled on a bit and then struggled up to continue his headlong career.

I followed him in more sedate and cautious fashion. I was wearing shoes, not boots, and the stones hurt my ankles. I am fond of walking, and certainly prefer it to rolling down stony slopes. I had beaten the corporal at most stages of the ascent, and was perfectly content that he should get down to the bottom thirty minutes before me and order us two cups of tea at an establishment on the road. Meanwhile I was alone for a while, and could not help pondering over the strange destiny which had sent me from an Oxfordshire farmhouse, and him from a brewer's office in Weymouth, to play chess and talk about Lulworth Cove on the topmost desolation of an Oriental mountain.

I had given him, so he told me, one of the best laughs of his life. We had been discussing post-war England and its probable austerities. I was just saying that drink was likely to remain an impossibly expensive luxury, when I started slithering down the rock I was standing on, and crashed with a complete lack of that dignity which is expected from holders of His Majesty's Commission. The combination of my theme and my collapse so tickled his fancy that it was nearly half an hour before he stopped chuckling over it.

I wonder whether that joke will remain as his most vivid memory of our two-day expedition, or whether he will remember longer the lonely wilderness of rock, the grey wind and the inviolable silence. For me, nothing I saw on the mountain can match that earlier picture—the picture of huddled humanity in a dingy room, of hungry eyes fixed on rows of figures and piles of money, of the quiet courtesy that waited for the foreign Captain-of-the-Band to depart with his legionary, leaving the Scribes and Elders to argue with the Publican, over matters which spelt a year of prosperity or a year of hardship in the little world of their village.

## II. ELVISH

I HAVE argued that all new things (particularly in politics) are but re-combinations and re-orientations of ancient and well-recognized elements. In the midst of the Victorian Era, when the worship of Progress involved dogmas more tenacious than any that the Popes had launched, Society was suddenly compelled to listen to an unreliable but eloquent historian from Ecclefechan who had published a book called *Past and Present*. It preached the then astonishing heresy that our ancestors were not so very different from (and in many ways superior to) the ladies and gentlemen who read it.

I am temperamentally inclined to disagree with most of Carlyle's opinions. All but Germans must now disagree with his estimate of Prussian Frederick and his wild talk about the nonsense called Race, though only a clod could fail to be moved by his magnificent prose-poem on the French Revolution. As I have already said, I can see no grounds on which to base a judgment that the past was better than the present, or indeed any age better than another.

By what standard can one pass any such judgment on a whole epoch? By what standard do so many people maintain that we are better than our forebears? Such octogenarian friends as I talked with in Beirut might have some opinion of value on the times through which they have actually lived, but it is just they (and amongst them I do not include youngsters of 50 or even 65) who are most hesitant to lay down any law. Nor can the dogmatists escape the inevitable difficulty of changing standards. We may feel indignant superiority over those ancestors of ours who used torture with more gusto and more publicity than we do, and flattered kings a little more blatantly than we flatter millionaires and film-stars. But if those ancestors can take a bird's-eye view of our civilization from above, they no doubt feel equally superior, and equally indignant, at the kindly encouragement many of us extend to what they regarded as the unspeakable horror of suicide and the ignorant way in which we monkey about with the sacrament of marriage. Who is to judge between us? Or rather (since hasty judges are distributing their sentences from every railway bookstall) on what firm principles do their authors dare to pass judgment between their own age and one long vanished?

Moral condemnations apart (and I think we are wise to keep very far apart from them) there is much pleasure and interest to be gained

by comparing the institutions and the atmospheres of different ages. In this instructive recreation the chief handicap is Words. Words change more rapidly and radically than Things, and their power to mislead is unending. If I have elsewhere translated 'centurion' into 'sergeant-major' and 'publican' into 'tax-collector', I am perfectly conscious that I am misleading the reader in detail. But I am quite sure that, in essence, I am not misleading him so far astray as those who would have him believe that the quaint old names betoken some different and extinct species, whose reactions to such unchanging phenomena as Discipline or Money were totally different from our own. A centurion held a more independent command than a modern Warrant Officer, over (as his name implies) one hundred men. But, socially and psychologically, the important thing about him was that he had risen from the ranks. The sergeant-major, hesitating to 'beat up a wog' arrested in some Palestinian brawl, does not perhaps go to the chief captain saying, "Take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman". But I think he would quite likely go back to his commissioned officer and say, "Better be careful about this chap, sir, he's got a British passport". So much have words changed, and so little have things. We have fewer intimate records of medieval life than of Roman, but I think we should approach the Middle Ages with a pre-supposition that the seneschal of some hopelessly beleaguered castle might have felt much as Koenig did at Bir Hakeim and answered much as he answered; and that 'sages' and 'jongleurs' had some things in common with Oxford dons and music-hall entertainers.\*

Now that we are launched on our recreation, it might be interesting to examine a more recondite and debatable instance of the way in which one variation of Human Nature can defy Time and the pressure of changing circumstance. It is germane to the story of this book, so far as this book has a story. It may provoke discussion and, without discussion, no conclusion is safe.

I would like to discuss it on the basis of a poem. Poetry is one of the most terse, most businesslike and sometimes most accurate forms of statement, when one is examining the mental mechanism of Man. It is certainly more manageable and less misleading than the windy pedantries of contemporary psychology.

We are accustomed to think of the 'artistic temperament' as a

\* For the centurion, see Acts xxii, 24-6. For General Koenig, see p. 44. In my attempts to modernize ancient terms, I have the occasional authority of the Authorized Version of the Bible, which gives us *sheriffs* listening to *cornet* tunes on the plains of Babylon (Daniel iii, 3-5.).



wholly modern conception. It is true that there was always something sacred about poetry and the arts. The Roman poet, the *vates sacer*, claimed some of the sanctity of the priest. But there is little record of his making the modern claim to be a person different in kind from his fellows, a person to whom the ordinary rules of life could not be applied.

Still less would we expect to find a denizen of the Middle Ages making such a claim. Yet there is one poem which suggests it, and throws a flood of life on all the psychological aberrations that accompany creative talent. *The Ballad of True Thomas* crystallized into its present form in Tudor or Stuart times; but it seems to be rooted in some more archaic poem at whose date we can only guess.

The ballad-maker, being happily unaware of Unconscious Ego or the Escapism Urge, conveys his meaning better by talking about Elfland. The Queen of Elfland having chosen True Thomas for her apprentice, or victim, takes him to a place where he can see the narrow and thorny path of Righteousness, and the broad road that leads to Hell. Thomas, the artist, is not bound, like most men, to choose one of the two: for him there is a third.

“And see ye not that bonny road,  
That winds above the ferny brae?  
Oh that is the road to fair Elfland,  
Where thou and I this night maun gae.”

The simile seems to me a very satisfying and precise one, clearer than the rather ponderous claim (a wrong one, as it seems to me) that ‘the creative artist should be exempt from the rules of morality that bind the average man’.

A queerer instance of successful symbolism is the golden apple with which the Queen presents Thomas, telling him that it will give him ‘the tongue that can never lie’. This does not immediately square with our ideas about poets and artists; but Thomas soon shows what the ballad-maker is after. He tries to protest. “A goodly gift ye would give to me!” foreseeing what every creative artist must in the end come to know—that this peculiar vision of the Truth, his inescapable mission to tell that Truth as he sees it, is bound to put him at a disadvantage in all ordinary dealings with ordinary people.

"I neither dought to buy nor sell  
At fair or tryst where I may be:  
I dought neither speak to Prince or Peer,  
Nor ask a grace of fair ladye."

In other words, he will not be able to tell the lies necessary to successful business dealings, to offer the expected flattery to those in power—or perhaps even to restrain his laughter in their pompous presence—or to keep his tongue properly glib at the crucial moments of his love affairs. This last and somewhat unexpected point is the most revealing of all. It explains much that is otherwise inexplicable in a long series of poets' and artists' lives, whereof Shakespeare and Keats are perhaps the best-known examples.

The Ballad is shorter than most, and even more inconclusive. But it gives one more example of a familiar thing translated into a strange yet precise and truthful emblem. We sometimes find persons of artistic temperament are the foremost fighters against cruelties, injustices and oppressions (though if they use their creative gifts too exclusively for the purpose, as Dickens just avoided doing, they are in danger of degenerating from poets into propagandists). Most of them are more acutely aware than their neighbour of the sum-total of human cruelty and misery, feel the sufferings of others almost as unbearable as their own, and are crucified with the crucifixion of the race. Let True Thomas put it with less rhetoric and more exactitude:

"It was mirk, mirk night. There was no starlight.  
They waded in red blood up to the knee.  
For all the blood that is shed upon earth  
Runs through the springs o' that countrie."

### III. IN A TEA-CUP

THIS book has been written, piecemeal, in some rather unusual places and circumstances. I am writing the present paragraph, for instance, in an aeroplane. We have just passed over the Desert (what the Naval Report on a certain Scottish station called 'the miles and miles of damn-all, surmounted by the same') which lies between Damascus and Baghdad. It is now crossing the mountains of Luristan on its way to Persia.

The voyage has been a bumpy one, and the bumps have made it

difficult to write, especially to write about my memories of eight months ago: for it is nearly that time since I left Beirut. The lady in the opposite seat is worse off than me. She is depositing her lunch and breakfast into a series of little cardboard receptacles provided by the Airways Company, while her husband keeps holding up her chin.\*

I wrote one short passage on top of the Great Pyramid, where one is at least safe from sea- or air-sickness: it is pretty stable. I scribbled some of the verses on horseback. The map which now serves as frontispiece was laid out during two days when I was supposed to be in bed with sandfly fever, my only sickness of any sort during two and a half years in the East. (I should, I suppose, touch wood when saying that, but everything seems to be leather or metal in this aeroplane.) And a very substantial portion of the book was written while we sat day and night in the office at Beirut and watched the progress of disturbances which some dignified with the name of a Revolution.

Still following my master, Time, I would like to lead up to my account of that strange episode with one or two less important matters.

There was no sign of trouble and no breach of relations with our French friends during the summer and early autumn of 1943. I took the opportunity to organize at least one international *divertissement*. I invented for the purpose a 'Consolidated Company of Cavaliers and Swordsmen'. It included a Jugo-Slav airman who could neither fence nor ride: a most charming captain from the French *Sûreté Générale* who could do both, but never had the energy to get himself out of bed early enough for either: my Jesuit father, who preferred quarter-staffing with his scouts and taking them for marches on Shanks's mare: a lady from the British Consulate who knew little of horses and nothing of fencing foils, but contributed wholeheartedly to the singing at the entertainments, and the President of the American University and his wife, who technically justified their inclusion by lending a genuine and undoubted Crusader's broadsword dug up on the seashore near Beirut.

We took the vast upper room of the French Officers' Club and lit it with candles only. We sang old English songs and tried to make the Jugo-Slav sing old Jugo-Slav ones. We recited anything

\* I am merely guessing that he is her husband. They may be an unmarried couple, escaping to Persia in order to lead a life of sin. If so the gentleman is being very promptly punished by a very proper and copious disillusionment.

that came into our heads. The *pièce de résistance* was two scantily-rehearsed scenes from Shakespeare. As the strains of 'Oft in the Stilly Night' died down, Hamlet started up from the candlelit table of an imaginary guard-room, saw his father's ghost on the moonlit balcony that overlooked the sea, and drew sword and dagger on those who tried to prevent him from following it. He incidentally tore his tropical shirt, on the rough wire we had used to fasten cross hilts on to fencing-weapons and turn them into Elizabethan rapiers and *mains gauches*.

Sir Giles Isham, as Mercutio, fought double-handed with Tybalt, while my cautious Corsican fencing-master hovered about in agony at the maskless and jacketless proceedings. Owing to most inefficient rehearsal he got one small scratch, but it was, in the words that Shakespeare was putting into his mouth, *neither so deep as a well nor so wide as a church door*.

There were unsolicited requests for an *encore* of the whole evening and I was making plans for a rather more elaborate experiment for entertaining a more widely chosen audience of our Allies and showing them a side of English life which makes little appearance in official propaganda. We were rehearsing for it, and rehearsing properly, when the Lebanese disturbances broke out, and made all *liaison*, official and unofficial, too ticklish a matter for experiments.

When I look back on that business now, from a distance of eight months (and from whatever height our aeroplane has climbed over the mountains), I cannot help feeling amused at those who talked of the Lebanese 'Revolution'. It was a mild kind of revolution which was accompanied by a total of 30 deaths altogether, though those included one avoidable incident at which the mind still sickens. Nor is the word justified by the political principles involved, which were hardly revolutionary, and certainly not by the immediate results, which were negligible. But I sometimes speculate upon the ultimate results—the wedge driven between Free France and Britain, the encouragement given to certain feeble Oriental forces which may one day prove very far from feeble; and I sometimes wonder whether the storm in our little tea-cup is not going to have, after all, some influence on the tides that swing the Ocean.

I may claim to have sat on the lip of the cup, and to have had first-class opportunities for watching the liquid bubble. It was, by chance, my turn to be duty officer (though I was not actually playing chess with my friend the corporal) when an early morning 'phone-

call warned our office that certain arrests had been made and a crisis precipitated. It was subsequently our duty to sit in the building all day and sleep in it all night, using it as a base and sorting-house for the fullest and most accurate information on what was actually happening. So long as the crisis lasted we could *do* nothing: we could only *know* and pass on our knowledge to others. How far I can reproduce any of that knowledge here is another matter.

Sir Walter Raleigh, writing his *History of the World* from his prison in the Tower of London, would not include his own epoch, saying that he would not follow too closely on the heels of Time, lest he should get his teeth knocked out. He was wise, for his head was already at stake. I am not myself writing in fear of the axe, but I think my little book might get seriously and very properly truncated by the censor if I indulged in anything but generalities.

Indiscretions might also draw me into regrettable quarrels with many good-hearted and intelligent people, who had almost as many facts to go on as myself, but drew totally different conclusions from them. I can remember one hot-headed youngster who came and attacked me at the time and, in spite of my constant requests to change the topic for one less controversial, ended melodramatically by calling me a traitor, because I refused to follow him in saying that the French were worse than the Nazis. Considering who were officially our Allies at the time and who our enemies, it struck me that the boot was perhaps on the other foot.

Such diatribes get nobody anywhere, or anywhere where a sensible man would want to be. It is better to begin with a little encomium on what was really praiseworthy.

The truth was that, since July 1941, we and the French had been achieving the impossible in Syria and the Lebanon, doing something that always raises a contemptuous and incredulous smile on the lips of trained political thinkers. We had been trying to govern a country on a basis of split sovereignty, and for two years we had very largely succeeded. Syria and the Lebanon had been tolerably well policed, cleared of spies and enemy propagandists, prevented from molesting our troops or stealing too much of their rations and equipment, curbed from riots and brigandage, and plentifully supplied with food. All this was achieved in a country where no one knew exactly who was master. I can think of no more difficult achievement.

It had not been done without friction and irritation; both French and British mutually tended to take sole credit for joint successes,

and cast all blame for joint error on the other party. Meanwhile, with no one quite knowing where ultimate sovereignty lay, mutual misunderstandings increased. We were divided by the wall of our different language, outlook and national purpose, and new bricks were daily added to it by possibly honest, but certainly thoughtless, grumblers. By November 1943, there were many Englishmen who were sincere and positive in thinking they had to work through, or even under, a set of corrupt, suspicious, ungrateful, obstructionist and occasionally treacherous degenerates. There were no less sincere Frenchmen who believed that they were being made cat's paws for a clever and hypocritical British Imperialism, personified by a set of grudging, grasping, discourteous and above all self-righteous bullies. And both these bands of extremists could cite cartloads of evidence to prove their point. It is hardly surprising that when the proposal to split sovereignty between three parties instead of two came to a head, there was a great deal of mud stirred up, a nasty smell and a considerable amount of tempest.

The third party's contribution to the smell and mud was no small one. The Lebanese had been under French rule for some 20 years. That simple fact alone accounted for three-quarters of them wanting a change of masters, some talking wildly of preferring the old days of Turkish rule. If there had been grave faults of commission or neglect on the part of the French governors, that is no new thing in the history of the world, and rumour, deliberately fostered by the governed, exaggerated them beyond recognition. The supposed French avarice in the matter of the *Intérêts Communs* kept people howling for months, until it was examined by a financial expert (appointed by an institution reputed to be distinctly anti-French) and found, by arithmetic, to be pure myth. But where facts and figures could not be so checked, the Lebanese kept up an increasing campaign of slander against all things French, in which very just accusation was mixed with the most malicious nonsense. The atmosphere was created and maintained with considerable skill, at chance meetings and hospitable gatherings as well as through semi-official channels, with British kindness and fair play as the ultimate target. It hit the bull's-eye again and again. I did not exactly blame the Lebanese for it. Politics make all men do and say strange things. But I was sorry to see British soldiers and officers swallowing the stuff whole and letting the French know they were doing so. . . .

I am no longer writing in an aeroplane. My travelling companion is—I trust—no longer being sick. I have been safely grounded this half-hour and am sitting in a Persian garden among hospitable Englishmen. My only difficulty is that of preventing myself from being distracted by the interesting and sometimes wittily talk around me. One man is telling an amusing story about a fellow who, by handling and biting a piece of glue, can tell immediately in what factory it was made. Another is speaking of the Russian officers in Tehran. I am in a sense in touch with that vast war machine which the Russians wield. I hope we, they and Persia will never find ourselves playing such a disagreeable three-cornered game as I witnessed in the Lebanon. The Persian is a crafty bird.

I ought to be giving all my attention to the conversation in the garden instead of sitting apart with my paper on my knee. But the queen of Elfland hath me in thrall and I must write, write, write. . . .

When the crisis actually fell upon the Lebanon, most of the more sensible Frenchmen were aghast at what some leader (no one seemed quite sure who) had suddenly ordered. A certain highly placed Frenchman's comment, '*Un acte de folie pure*', was widely quoted. Prudence apart, morality apart, it seems a schoolboy blunder to arrest the members of a *new* government, a government from which all good was expected and of which no harm was yet known. Arrest added the martyr's crown to its untried perfections. Six months' delay would probably have sufficed for it to make itself thoroughly unpopular, and the country only too glad to see its members arrested. The course adopted was idiotic, callow and surprisingly un-French. For who but an idiot could have decided that such drastic and high-handed action was necessary, when international complications made it obvious that it would have to be followed by immediate surrender and the most disastrous climb-down?

There is no answer to that question, put in that form, nor to the many similar questions it produces. I think a very close study of a vast mass of petty detail, stretching back over two years, might help to show why that particular idiocy was committed, almost inevitably, at that particular time. Without such study the situation was unreal and incredible. But I have said I must stick to generalizations.

I remember that, at the crisis of the troubles, I paid a short visit to a young French friend, one of the most intelligent and balanced men I know, and a great lover of all things English. I found him haggard and, if still friendly, a little guarded. He told me that he



THE GLUE-TASTER  
OF TEHERAN

*With apologies to certain  
Persian Miniaturists of the  
Decadence (1750-1850)*





wished he had never opened his mouth in England's favour: British Imperialism had suddenly, within a few days, become to him a very real and very hideous thing. He said that if England had gone down the drain, leaving French armies to protect her colonies, France would never have played quite so dirty a trick on her, nor manœuvred her so subtly into a position where every policy spelt ruin.

I give his opinion for what it is worth, which may not be very much. I am certain it was utterly sincere, and based on very deep feeling. He was too sorely wounded for me to rub in salt, though he himself was quick to acknowledge that there had been grave faults on his side. But it would have been useless as well as cruel to tell him that the worst vice of his country is suspicion. Some people are never happy unless they can believe that their best friend is about to stab them in the back. The short and very painful interview is recorded here 'for information only'. I do not know what deductions could or should be drawn from it.

The attitude of the third party demands one word, and suggests a definite deduction. I have said that the institution I worked for held a purely watching brief, and had no object except to collect and collate information. We made one small recommendation. We sent a representative to Sidon, suggesting to a local notable that with a few cases of bloodshed already reported, it would be better if an end were put to processions and demonstrations in the streets by school children. The reply, to European ears, was an odd one: "he would do his best, but, with feeling running so high, he was doubtful of success." One might have thought that times when feeling is running high are times when children should be kept at home. It seems to me to show well the mixture of timidity and sentimentality in the Oriental mind. "The great big soldiers would never hurt the poor little children" is a poor cover for 'If I send my children out to demonstrate, I can stay in safety myself'. In effect, I think only one child was killed by bullets in Sidon: but in another town a procession of them was organized, and half a dozen were mashed to death beneath the caterpillar wheels of armoured vehicles. I was not there at the time, and cannot judge what degree of guilt lies upon driver or officer. But I know that some lies elsewhere.

I have done. It is peaceful now in the garden, which is so like an English one with its grass, its ducks, and its overshadowing trees. My companions have gone into the house. Their cheerful voices barely reach me.

There are horrors enough in Persia, where brigandage is a profession, where neither man, woman nor child can safely leave this modernized town for some of the valleys in the huge brown mountains that stand over it like a wall. Twilight is falling, I must pack up my writing and go into dinner. But I cannot help giving a thought, however trite, to the strangeness of man's nature, which makes the strangeness of his fate. How can it change him so rapidly from an amusing comrade at dinner, from friend and guide and helper, to a cowardly or blood-splashed beast?

#### IV. HATTING

SOON after the unexpectedly tranquil subsidence of the three-cornered crisis in the Lebanon I was temporarily transferred to Zahle. The object of the move was not to facilitate my chess-playing and mountaineering recreations on Mount Sannin, but to keep an official eye on what I have described as the principal recreations of the 'Zahliots, drug-smuggling and gun-running.

I was immediately the target for innumerable tales of arsenals and hoards of hashish in the cellars of my informants' private enemies, and I even took part in a fruitless game of hunt-the-slipper all over the quaint and picturesque little town—the slipper being half a dozen lorry tyres which had recently been stolen from Baalbek and were rumoured to have gone their clandestine way to Zahle, where they could probably command anything over £100 apiece. I did not find them, but to judge by some remarkable specimens of facial expression and muscular reaction that I encountered in my researches, I must have been disturbing quite a large number of uneasy consciences with skeletons (or something more marketable) in their cupboards.

One of the best things about my time in Zahle was the good excuse I had for paying unofficial visits to Baalbek. It is, in itself, rather an attractive little town, situated in the centre of the fertile plain of the Beka'a. One has not far to wander from its centre in order to find oneself in a very English-looking patch of streams, hedges and willow clumps, among which stand ruins unique in the world.

I am not easily influenced by Roman things, preferring a time-battered medieval castle to the more sumptuous and well-preserved

arches and temples that Roman Imperialism scattered around the Mediterranean. But Baalbek is a thing apart, and of a grandeur not easily forgotten.

A vast temple dedicated to Jupiter, and a smaller one dedicated to Bacchus, stood side by side on a huge platform of masonry, the stones of which, certainly bigger than those of the pyramids, are said to be the biggest used for any building in the world. Their solidity could not preserve the Temples from earthquake, which, 17 centuries after their erection, suddenly reduced them from practically intact structures to picturesque ruins.

What is left, particularly the towering pillars that once formed Jupiter's colonnade, is of unequalled splendour. I know nothing of the North African remains, but I do not think Rome left anything *so magnificent as well as so elaborately decorated, in Greece, Southern France, or in her native Italy*. The so-called *Maison Carrée* at Nîmes is, of course, far better preserved: but it compares with Baalbek as might a small, plain chapel with the remnants of Tintern Abbey.

Baalbek has long been a 'sight', and as such has attracted the usual streams of tourists—of whom, however, the most ribald seldom fail to be impressed. They are tamed and kept in place by the inevitable iron railings, turnstiles and souvenir-shops. The former are luckily climbable, if you find the right spot. It is worth while to do so either at dawn or sunset, when all the books agree that the ruins take on a new atmosphere of grandeur, and when all the gates are firmly locked. You will be none the worse for approaching your objective along little tinkling streams, hidden from outraged officialdom by the slender stems and shivering foliage of the willows.

One equally official mission took me farther afield than Baalbek, and left me, as evening came on, near the remote and quite unspoilt village of Al Qa'a, where there was a more abstruse piece of history to be hunted down.

It would never have become anything but a remote village had it not, for a passing moment, attracted the attention of Fakr-al-Din. Fakr-al-Din-al-Ma'an was a Druse chieftain of the early seventeenth century, who spent long years in the cities of Italy, and acquired a taste for Renaissance or rather Baroque culture. On his return he managed, by a combination of adroit wire-pulling at Istanbul, and open warfare against the local Turkish pashas, to make himself an almost independent prince of Mount Lebanon, together with its coastal towns on the west, and the fertile plains of the Beka'a beneath

its eastern slopes. He built furiously everywhere, particularly at Sidon and Beirut. But when he at last had to give up long-cherished hopes of naval assistance from Italy, and to fear the Turkish fleet, he decided to transfer the seat of his authority inland. He chose Al Qa'a and began to build a new capital there, at the north end of the Beka'a plain, where it begins to open out towards Homs. He was too late: his day was done. The Turkish galleys were soon taking him away to Istanbul, to the dungeon and the bowstring.

I came to Al Qa'a about sunset and found it looking very picturesque between the blue-grey slopes of Lebanon in the west and the still rose-tinted rocks of the anti-Lebanon to eastward. My arrival was expected, and I was immediately made to feel that the whole village had been ransacked to give me a friendly and—by its simple standards—a luxurious welcome: that instead of an unimportant captain, I was one of the lords of creation.

I was taken to the house of a jolly and muscular *Mukhtar*, and immediately pressed to eat some of those Arabic *bors-d'auvres* which so often leave one with no storage-room for the real dinner. I was almost embarrassed by the warmth and frequency of the compliments that were showered upon me to put me at my ease. The only deficiency was mine, my shameful inability to speak my hosts' language. The conversations went on through two interpreters, the village's diminutive schoolmaster, who could twitter in French, and an English-speaking rogue, from a place some miles away, whom I subsequently discovered to be one of the principal organizers of thefts from the many British camps in his area.

Neither my hostess nor her daughter was permitted to appear much, let alone sit down with us at dinner: and I was considered a little eccentric when, next morning, I wanted to thank her for the hospitality of the house. Al Qa'a is a Christian village, but it perhaps catches some of its social conventions from the almost exclusively Muslim district around it. I do not know how this situation came about, nor whether its traditions derive from Fakr-al-Din's short-lived patronage. A Druse himself (neither Christian nor Muslim, but something it would take many pages to explain)—he favoured Christian and even European workmen, and may have dumped a sufficient number of them here to be begetters of the modern population of Al Qa'a.

After dinner, we went to see part of a wedding-ceremony (they can go on for three weeks). It consisted principally in everyone

jigging a slow and rather half-hearted step in a crowded farmyard to the wearily repetitive sound of one pipe and one drum. We then adjourned to an even more crowded room to watch selected performers do things that were not even jigs, but mainly body-swayings and arm-twistings. I was invited to contribute a turn, and was at first inclined to refuse. Then I remembered how often it had been politely hinted to me that, while British justice and consideration were prized almost above all others, British shyness, awkwardness and standoffishness made French and Americans more welcome guests to native society. I decided to accept the invitation and ("in for a penny, in for a pound") leaped and twirled and pirouetted like King David before the Ark. My performance was certainly an unusual one for such a place and I do not know whether it caused more delight or dismay to the inhabitants to see a British officer adopt so active and un-Oriental a style of dancing.

Next morning we visited the ruins, followed by all the village notables, who were looking solemn and trying to make me believe that they knew who Fakr-al-Din-al-Ma'an was. The *Mukhtar* pointed out to me a long straight line cutting across the field divisions and forming a tangent to the circumference of the village. Here the Prince had presumably built some sort of conduit for his water. It ran to what may or may not have been the Palace, a large square building of which only the foundations remain. To one who has no eye for details of masonry they might have been of any period from the Assyrian to the nineteenth century. The *Mukhtar* and a few others could remember a time, forty years ago, when the building stood relatively intact. But the then notables had decided to take them down and use the stones to build themselves a new and larger church. It is the same story that is endlessly repeated and deplored by archaeologists, wherever men have built well and been succeeded by poorer or lazier generations of builders, who play more havoc than earthquake or barbarians or war. I could not myself deplore the repetition at Al Qa'a very deeply. The world may have lost an interesting building in which Arabism strove with the late Renaissance. The village gained a rather pretty church and avoided the danger of becoming a minor centre of such Tourism as might have spoilt its admirable hospitality towards strangers.

I fear that I myself was constrained by kindness to contribute one little item to the modernization of Al Qa'a, and the destruction of its primitive simplicity.

The English-speaking rogue had departed on the previous night and the little schoolmaster was left as my sole interpreter. He also accompanied me on a short ride I took around the village. Any impressions he gave of weakness or bookishness immediately disappeared as soon as he jumped into the saddle. He was not native to the place, but came from Transjordan, possibly from some place where they breed fierier and less manageable steeds than those we rode. With greater skill, added to the advantage of stature (your small man always comes into his own on horseback), he must have made me look like an ungainly amateur.

When we were out of sight and hearing of the others, he began to reveal to me what had clearly been very near to his heart for a very long time. And I felt as if I had suddenly stepped into some scene from a Russian play, preferably by Gogol or Chekov.

No one in the village, he said, had ever worn a hat. All went barcheaded, or wore linen head-cloths. He felt that he himself, as village schoolmaster and representative of universal culture, should, as a duty, acquire unto himself a trilby hat. Only so could he properly overawe his pupils and carry due weight at the village council-board. But a wistful look came into his eyes as he told me that he could afford neither the purchase nor the journey to town which it would entail. Could I help him to obtain even a second-hand hat? And would I accept in return (here the voice faltered a little) his most treasured personal possession, a little bag of coloured beads which he used as a case for his watch and now dangled hesitantly before my eyes.

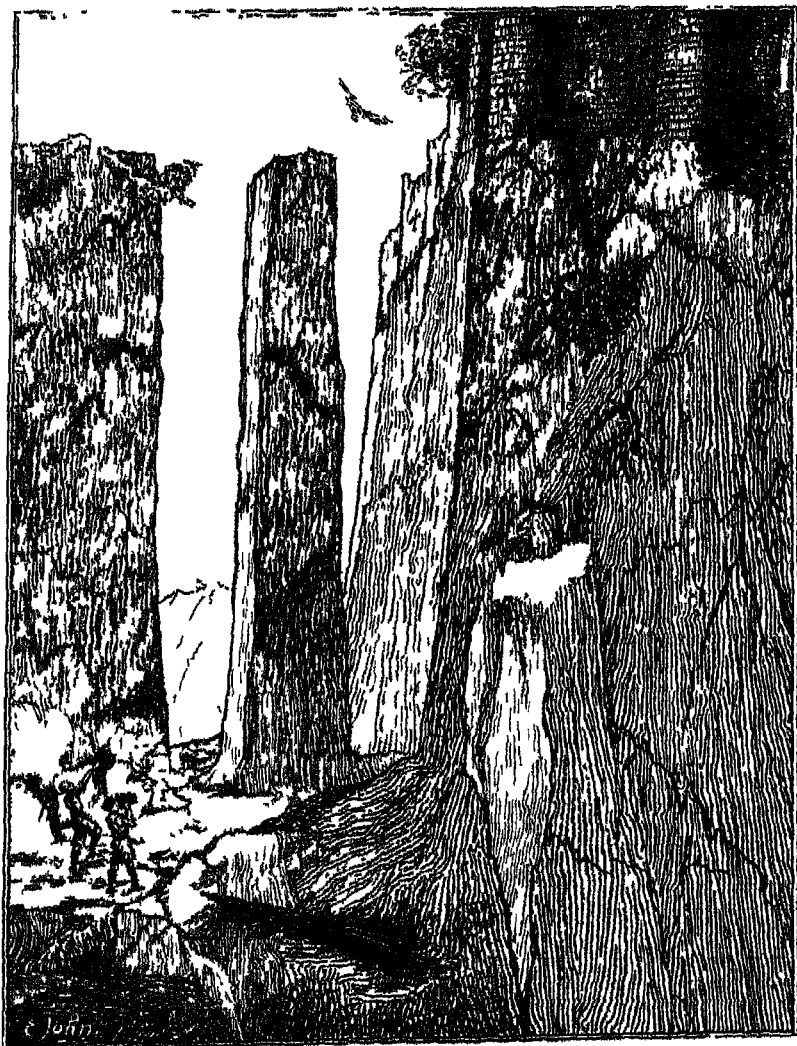
I waved the proffered gift back into his pocket. I promised my assistance and made an unnecessary fuss (as, God knows why, one always does) about being busy and perhaps not being able to do anything for a week or two. In point of fact I was going to Damascus that night, and twenty minutes should have sufficed for the satisfaction of his soul's yearning. But at least I left him happy, trusting to the Englishman's word.

As it turned out, I had been wise to counsel patience. Neither the hat-shops of Damascus nor those of Beirut could provide for me a hat that was anything like as small as the head measurement he had given me. He did not get his hat until it was almost too late for a Christmas present. By then I had found one of approximately the right dimensions. It was a special child's size.

I still keep the charming and courteous letter in which he thanked







"THUS CAME THEY, UPON THE FRAS<sup>t</sup>  
OF OUR LORD'S NATIVITY, UNTO  
THE CASTLE OF SAHYÛN"

*With apologies to  
Gustave Doré*

me, in his best French, for the treasure I had sent him. I sometimes wonder whether he made a ceremony of writing it, and donned his little trilby before sitting down to his desk.

## V. ALEPPO

SOON after my visit to Al Qa'a, I was posted away from Zahle and became more peripatetic than ever. December found me stationed at Aleppo. It was from there that I slipped away for my merry Christmas party with the Corinthians and the Boxing Day steeplechase.

Christmas morning itself, an unexpectedly sunny one, saw myself, the Captain, and a camera making our way by truck and a little footwork to the castle of Sahyûn—or Saône, as the Crusaders called it.

It is older than their time. The hog's back of rocky ridge whereon it is built, defended on three sides by precipitous cliffs, is crowned by a citadel of Byzantine workmanship. This was presumably erected towards the end of the tenth century, when that very active soldier, the Emperor Tzimisces, was leading his men down into these parts. But it appears to have been the Crusaders in the next century who did the really surprising thing. They did not like the easy approach from the hill on its fourth side and proceeded to hack a moat, fifty feet deep and some thirty wide, through the solid rock of the whole ridge outside the castle's eastern walls. In its midst they left one slender needle of virgin stone as a pier for the bridge which spanned the new gulf and led to the main gate. The result is perhaps unique in the world, though, if my memory serves me right, there is a natural, not an artificial, formation used for the same purpose outside a much smaller castle in Belgium. But that castle is, significantly, Bouillon, from which Godfrey led his Crusaders to Syria and the Holy Land.

They seem to have been so pleased with their job at Saône (and who wouldn't be, with such a marvel accomplished and no rock-drills or dynamite to help?) that they built themselves new living quarters on the lip of the moat, where they could contemplate and congratulate themselves on their minions' handiwork, and guarded it with what modern writers call a Keep, but medieval architects a *Donjon*.

The Christmas visit to Sahyûn was followed by one short motor

run to Bab al Hawa, the Gate of the Winds, a queer set of ruins on the Turkish frontier, at whose date and origin no archæologists have yet been able to make a plausible guess. It was supposed to be on official business, but my part in the business was barely nominal, and the most amusing and companionable Free French officer who took me used the journey to shoot plover, with what seemed to me excellent marksmanship, on the rather bleak hills that surround Aleppo.

Otherwise I was kept in the city, and not sorry for a short residence there. It is finely and solidly built, with nothing gimcrack about it. It is overlooked by a most interesting citadel, largely in ruins, but guarded by a picturesque gatehouse and fortified bridge, splendidly preserved.

Aleppo seems early to have struck the imagination of Englishmen, as well as fired their instinct for profit. Shakespeare was apparently attracted by the name in its Italianate form (the French call it Alep, the Arabs Halab). He presumably knew of it as a *dépôt* for Venetian trade, and, to judge by the reference in *Macbeth*, ignored the eighty miles which separates it from the Mediterranean and thought of it as a sea-port. Geography was not a strong point in the *curriculum* of the Stratford-on-Avon Grammar School.

The town was the first one in the world to see a British Consulate established. Until comparatively recent times the Consul lived, unpaid, on the *bakshish* contributed by the local merchants, who found it worth their while to keep in his good books. When he needed a larger income than they felt inclined to give him unsolicited, his solicitation took the effective form of consular *kavasses* sent out with thick sticks to give a good beating to anyone in the bazaar who did not put money in the hat. History does not record whether the sticks were used for any other purpose, but I have been told that Aleppo has a strong claim, perhaps as strong as that of any Hampshire village, to having been the scene of the first game of cricket.

It is rather an austere place in the winter, which is often hard and occasionally long. Its houses are better built and easier to warm, even in the poor quarters, than those of Damascus or Beirut. But the wind howls down its streets and sleet whips at the window-panes. It lacks the gardens of those two cities. It lacks, abominably, their clumps and avenues of trees. The view outside, for instance from the citadel, shows bare and monotonously undulating slopes. But both the British and the French officers who are stationed here (and

seem to have achieved a more efficient co-operation and a closer friendliness than anywhere else in the Levant), speak of it with affection, and appear to have succumbed to the rather severe charm of its grey or tawny stones, its gaunt surroundings.

I myself only spent a few weeks there, in extremely wet and chilly weather, and I perhaps fail to do it justice. I was impatiently expectant of a summons to go south, to what I hoped would be more interesting and even active work, and the temporary job on which I had come failed to materialize in any but the most piecemeal fashion. I was left with the worst of all duties, that of having to be present at an office where there was little or nothing to keep me busy. I sat in a chilly room, drawing up a few official charts, and trying to write a few unofficial limericks. I looked out of the window at the sleet and rain. The weather grew wetter and colder as Christmas approached, and there was the dreariest of Decembers in my heart.

'The winter of my discontent' was much tempered by the three officers with whom I worked, dined and drank. Not that I did much drinking with the first, since he was a devout Muslim, a Cypriot Turk who had been educated at St. Paul's and sent back East to exercise his command of languages among the large and mixed population of Aleppo and the many travellers through it. The second was an ironic and amusing lawyer from Cornwall, who found much matter for his irony in Aleppo.

Of the third and of his moustache I have already spoken, if only in a footnote (page 119), and even attempted to portray. I learned many things from him, besides receiving much friendship and help in time of need.

But there was one secret I could not discover. I could not learn how to *seem* idle, and even irresponsible, and yet get everything done that is really worth doing. Especially how to get it done promptly. I studied his methods, but I cannot make them work. If I get a letter or telegram, and decide to take immediate action, I have only to take up the telephone to be told it is out of order, or that the institution I want is engaged—and remains engaged apparently for some hours. If I want to write a letter in prompt reply, I cannot do so because the file with the back reference is 'in action' and cannot be traced. If I go round and see someone who could speed matters on their immediate way, it is politely implied that I am fussing, and the matter can easily be held over for a couple of days, maybe for a couple of weeks.

My friend at Aleppo is more fortunate. Things *work*, for him. Things get done, and apparently with a minimum of effort on his part. Yet he too has had one bite at least of the elfin apple: he has spent many years studying music. Successful musicians have a reputation for being more difficult to deal with than anyone else in the world. But no one could say that of my friend. He is a simple-minded man, in the best sense of the word, and perhaps I would do best to follow him in taking one simple step. Instead of searching for far-fetched and intricate remedies for my administrative difficulties, I should perhaps grow a very large moustache.

### FIVE-LINE EXERCISES IN SHAKESPEARIAN GEOGRAPHY

" . . . And say, beside, that in Aleppo once,  
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk  
Beat a Venetian, . . . "

OTHELLO. V. 2. 352.

" Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master of the *Tyger*."

MACBETH. I. 3. 7.

" . . . to fetch dew  
From the still-vested Bermoothes, . . . "

THE TEMPEST. I. 2. 229.

A hatter from Venice, called Beppo,  
Was thrashed by a Turk of Aleppo,  
Who malignantly told him  
The turban he'd sold him  
Arrived full of moth from the dépôt.

A Scotsman, more canny than most,  
Sailed the *Tyger*—or such was his boast—  
To Aleppo, by route  
Of a still-vest Bermootc,  
And up the Bohemian coast.

Beppo, chapelier aleppin,  
Fut rossé par un Turc bien malin,  
Qui hurlait, "Tu mérites,  
Pour turbans pleins de mites,  
Etre payé avec ce gourdin!"

Un Ecossais, tricheur suprême,  
 Se vanta d'avoir, en birème,  
   Touché Alep, par route  
   Des vagues de Bermouthe,  
 Et les bords maritimes de Bohème.

---

Capellarium e Venetis  
 Ferit Turcus Beroeae virgis,  
   "Mitra," dicens maligné  
   "Ex te, Beppo indigne,  
 Nuper empti, est praeda larvis."

Callidus Caledonius forum  
 Se jactabat cepisse Alepporum,  
   Vela Tygris pandentem,  
   Bermouthem ad trementem  
 Ac maritimas oras Boiorum.

---

"Ένας Τούρκος, ποὺ, μιὰ φορὰ,  
 Βέππων ἔδωκε τὸν καπελλῶ,  
   Ἐῖπεν, "Ἐσττικίς μι,  
   Σκύλλε Βεντικέ,  
 Σιρίκι σκώρων φωληί."

Ἐῖς ἀγκίλους ναύτης τῆς Σκωτίας  
 "Στόν 'Αλέππον" (ὁ κανχηματίας!)  
   Ἐῖπε, "πῆγα στὴν Τίγριν,  
   Καὶ πῶ Βέρμουθες μίγδην  
 Βραξόων στὴν ἀκτὴν τῆς Βοεμίας."

## CHAPTER TEN

### EX-OFFICIO

"S'il est écrit aux cieux que jamais une épée  
N'étincelle dans mes mains,  
Dans l'encas et l'amertume une autre arme trempée  
Peut encoir servir les humains."

ANDRÉ CHÉNIER. *Lambes*, 1794.

#### I. DEPARTMENTAL

SOON after Christmas the wheel came full circle. After a few sturns, over which I must not linger, it landed me in the same office (and even the same *pension*) as I had inhabited when I first reached Cairo.

The Colonel with the air-conditioning contraption was now in the process of becoming a Brigadier; but he still quoted Junius, and was writing his letters with such a Napoleonic directness as I wish other official stylists would copy. The farmer's son and the young archaeologist had climbed, from being Captains, to Lieutenant-Colonelcies. But the former was still letting fresh air into a stuffy routine, and the latter still exercising a witty tongue and a ruthlessly efficient pen. The ex-administrative officer, when I finally tracked him down in a distant room, was still smiling wanly at the telephone.

He needed some tracking. The place had grown out of all recognition. The bureaucrats, still in battledress, had no more fear of Rommel's invading tanks, and, if they had had orders to decamp, could hardly have burned or packed the vast masses of still-accumulating paper in the same few hours. I remembered former days with wonder. I remembered our lack of staff, the few meagre files for which we rummaged ourselves, but could generally find in a few minutes. Now their successors stood ranked and multiplied and catalogued out of sight, and were brought forward smoothly and systematically, after a day's, or two days', delay. The British Empire was within sight of defeating Hitler's *Reich* and the organization of G.H.Q., M.L.F., was well within sight of defeating its own ends.

I was not surprised at the phenomenon. I had had opportunity on my travels to study too much departmental botany. You have only to plant a subaltern in some suitably requisitioned building, and

give him, perhaps, one batman-clerk-driver. You need not water or manure, and he will resist all efforts to prune. Come back in eighteen months and you will find that he has blossomed out into a Major, with two Captains to assist him and two budding Lieutenants as "stooges". There will be a healthily-multiplying rose-bud of typists, and a patch of rubbish-heap, where native elements, messengers and coffee-makers will have got their roots well dug in. At first sight, the whole organization will appear to be doing exactly the same work that the subaltern had done before, unaided. Actually it has the added burden of organizing its own pay and allowances, preventing overlapping of labour, assuring the welfare of its O.R.s, and petitioning for further increase of establishment or the requisition of larger premises.

If there is exaggeration in this picture, there is a large kernel of truth. Supposing the present 'Money doesn't matter' attitude survives the Peace Treaty, it augurs ill for our post-war life. Even if we can afford to go on throwing away Cash by handfuls, I doubt if we can go on throwing away Time. And I am sure we cannot afford to throw away any more Liberty. We have so little of it left. Bureaucracy is a habit, easily growing into a vice: and the habit of interfering with other people's lives is an easy one to acquire. Put any man into office and he may be an addict within six months. And he may never be able to shake the habit off.

Mussolini was perhaps speaking only for his own people, their German allies and their Russian opponents when he said "The world is tired of liberty". No country has ever had enough true liberty to grow weary of it. If the promise of nineteenth-century Liberalism has been disappointed, it may be because that same nineteenth century came to think of Liberty as a kind of commodity which a progressive human race was bound to go on manufacturing in larger and larger quantities. It is nothing of the sort. Liberty is an atmosphere, a tension, a challenge—one might almost say a risk. Certainly a society that prizes caution, and prides itself on being on the safe side, must say good-bye to liberty. Caution enables a man to make all his arrangements and then sleep with a contented mind. Liberty makes other demands. If we insist on thinking of it as a measurable commodity, we must at least remember that it has a purchase-price. And that price is eternal vigilance.

Let us strip the problem of the utterly irrelevant accretions which have got it mixed up with the quite different problems of democracy,



monarchy and dictatorship. Charles I claimed on the scaffold that he was about to die for the liberties of the ordinary Englishman, and there is a great deal of contemporary evidence (once we have disentangled it from Whig and Victorian propaganda) which justifies his claim. On the other hand, gay Paris was never less free, never cowed by so much grandmotherly and Puritanical red-tape as it was on the two occasions when its government was violently anti-monarchical—defying kingship in the person of Henri IV or committing murder-by-guillotine upon it in the person of Louis XVI. We must look elsewhere for the bones of our problem. And since rhetoric and vague historical allusion have done more than anything else to confuse the cause of liberty, I must drop them, and try to be more factual and precise.

I wish I had lived longer in the English country, and could be more factual and precise about the way in which (as I suspect) English agriculture is dying for lack of liberty. Power has passed from the squires and the greater landlords to milk-monopolists, owners of slaughter-houses and sausage-factories, speculative builders and all the rest of the rich townsmen who can grow richer by tweaking the strings on which their Parliamentary puppets dance. I know that they have passed laws to prevent my country neighbours from killing a cow or pig when and how the interests of their small farms demand. It may soon prevent them from wringing a hen's neck without permission in triplicate, or hatching out more chickens than happens to suit some rich corporation's interests.

But the impact of such vested interest is only a small part of the trouble. Far more damaging is the impact of ignorance and stupidity.

I myself once proposed to hire out a field to a neighbour as temporary pasture. An inspector arrived from London and decreed that a chalk-pit in it must first be fenced round (at an estimated cost of £60) for fear the animals should fall and break their legs in it. The field had had cows in it from time immemorial. They used to go down into the chalk pit for the shade of its trees, and (since cows are a good deal more intelligent than government inspectors) the oldest inhabitant of my district could not recall that any of them had ever had an accident.

The inspector's job was officially restricted to 'T.B.', not inclusive of broken bones (it is from a pseudo-medical angle that Liberty's walls are now being most cunningly sapped). But he was paid—and, by country standards, extremely well paid—to interfere with the lives

of villagers. He could hardly expect promotion unless his reports to his superiors showed that he had found excuses for doing so. Such inspectors are not recruited among people of abnormally high intelligence or inhuman integrity, and the result is a simple problem in psychology, which any man can tot up for himself. But the result of the sum spells the end of liberty and perhaps the end of agriculture.

I have spoken only of what I have personally witnessed, because otherwise, in country matters, I speak as a fool. Also, I can only speak of pre-War England, before I was a soldier or a traveller in the East. It remains to be seen whether or no we can reverse the pre-War processes and save the victim (already fighting a difficult battle against foreign competition) from finally succumbing to domestic chains.

I am perhaps better equipped to champion Liberty (and suggest the necessary vigilance) in matters where I have recent and inside information, drawn from daily personal experience. For I know how it feels to be a bureaucrat. I know just what temptations every man encounters in the work. And I know enough psychology to estimate just what large proportion of average men will not, and indeed cannot, resist those temptations. The equation is merely a matter of mathematics. To multiply offices and their staffs is to diminish proportionately the liberty of their subjects. And that is that.

A great part of my work was concerned with frontier control, and with restricting liberty of movement between one country and another.

I think I am right in saying that at the beginning of this century, a traveller leaving England for any part of Europe (except Turkey or Tsarist Russia) had no need to take with him any kind of passport. As for visas, exit-permits and '*permis de séjour*', most people did not know what the words meant. It was assumed, in the mental climate which then prevailed, and is now almost incomprehensible, that most travel was made for honest purposes and to the benefit of commerce or culture. Our grandfathers probably knew the fact which we so stubbornly refuse to acknowledge—that most forms of restrictions hamper the honest man and let through the rogue.

I need not dilate on the mental climate of mistrust which now weighs on us and threatens to grow more oppressive every year. I need not try to estimate what we are losing, in trade, in scientific progress and in international friendship, by forcing travellers to go

through so many formalities that many of them cannot be bothered to travel at all. I am quite aware that such considerations might have to go down before the paramount one of national safety, even if they spelt ultimate international ruin. But this could only be true on one condition—that the restrictions on travel actually did what they were supposed to do, safeguard the interests of the various nations. In this connection I will ask permission to tell two stories.

For the first I cannot vouch personally. It was told me for fact, but probably contains a good deal of embroidery. It is none the less amusing for that, and it is most illustrative.

I was told that one elderly representative of the League of Nations, a man who thought in realities instead of in words, once got up in the Assembly at Geneva and suggested that all visas should be everywhere abolished. He waited for the subsidence of the tempest which his suggestion naturally aroused—the derision of his folly and inexperience, the indignant enquiries how governments could hope to impede the movements of criminals, spies, drug-traffickers and white-slavers. Then he rose again, and gave the Assembly three specimen addresses of offices, in London, Berlin and Amsterdam, from which replicas of any form of passport, stamped with any form of visa, were issued at a reasonable price, to any criminal, spy, drug-trafficker or white-slaver who cared to pay. This roused a second tempest, wherein each representative loudly insisted that the frontier-guards and Customs officials of *his* country, at least, could easily detect such forgeries, and arrest the rogue who dared to use them. Still realistic, he drew from his pocket three forged passports, containing evidence that he had travelled extensively through Europe by their aid. Two contained false names, but his own photograph. The third had in it a snapshot of a buck negro,\* which no frontier guard had yet troubled to examine.

Of the second example I can speak from personal experience. After war had immensely tightened all restrictions, and presumably increased the conscientiousness and thoroughness of frontier control, a certain man, a merchant seaman, walked into the Y.M.C.A. at Beirut and ordered a cup of tea. He spoke with a foreign accent and caused some slight suspicion. He finally consented to go before the authorities and be examined, saying he was not unwilling to do so, as he was growing tired of the rather hole-and-corner life he had

\* It must be admitted that the photographs on most genuine passports make their bearers look like buck negroes. But this only strengthens the political argument.

been living for three years. Examination revealed that he was a German subject, holding a German passport, and that he had spent those three years travelling through England, America, British territory in Africa, and many parts of the Middle East. He had evaded or deceived all the frontier controls which are so efficient in hampering the movements of honest British and Allied subjects. This story needs no comment.

If liberty of movement is now disastrously dwindling (and to no good purpose), there is a second liberty about the diminution of which I also have first-hand personal knowledge and—for once—no desire to be frivolous, even in appearance. I mean liberty from imprisonment without trial. I was taught at school to regard it as the crux of all liberty, as is indeed proved in our own historical development. All I have seen in the East combines with tradition and common sense to confirm what I was taught at school.

There is at the present moment so large a proportion of the human race living behind prison walls or barbed wire, without trial or hope of trial, as must make some of our ancestors wonder how soon we are going to revert to the condition of the beasts. There are said to be close on a million in neutral Spain. I hope and believe that there are rather more in Axis and Axis-occupied territory than in the Allied countries. But I would not be at all surprised to hear, from authoritative sources, that the balance inclines the other way. Prisoners of war are clearly irrelevant to the argument: their incarceration is an obvious, though ugly necessity. The men and women arrested for espionage or sabotage on clear evidence or converging suspicions need not trouble us, even if military secrecy makes it quite impossible to discuss that evidence or those suspicions in any kind of trial. But there remains a rather terrifyingly large number of prisoners who remain prisoners for one reason only. Again I speak from experience: their opinions or activities were once judged by a certain small number of bureaucrats to be a possible danger to national security—Spanish, German, Egyptian, French, or British. From time to time their cases no doubt come up for review, their files are perhaps periodically 'brought forward' and laid on Somebody's desk. But Somebody may have only to mutter 'Safer to keep him inside', or, 'Can't afford to let her out', in order to pronounce, in effect, a sentence of six months' or a year's more imprisonment.

It is perhaps impossible to govern, certainly impossible to conduct

a war, without some licence in the matter of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. But Vigilance suggests that we must ask the question: "Who passed judgment on this prisoner?" And since the whole system is certainly not going to vanish with the signature of the Peace Treaty, it is still more important to enquire: "Who will be passing future judgments?"

I say that I speak from experience in this matter, and I hope I can avoid the reputation of being the bird that fouls its own nest. I hasten to record that the decisions I saw given, for imprisonment or release, were given in a spirit of patient impartiality, by men unusually free from religious, political or social bias, and men of quite exceptionally high intelligence. Two at least of the officers concerned described themselves as being of Leftish tendencies: most were by my own standards of somewhat anti-religious opinions. But I do not think that this biased their judgment against conservatives nor even against priests. I only wish I could be sure that all those who will have our lives and liberties at their disposal in the post-war future will be so well qualified and so conscientious. They may be so—if we are all sufficiently vigilant. But if we cease to keep watch on the machinery whereby they are appointed, we shall go on losing liberty with progressively accumulating momentum. And the more we hum and haw and refuse to recognize the danger, the more surely will our grandchildren be slaves.

## II. PERSICOS ODI, PUER, APPARATUS

TIRUL is something wrong about flying over mountains in an aeroplane. I must confess that there is a great interest in watching the formation of valley and watershed: in tracing the little black hair-lines of the mountain torrents until they become strings of silver streams and broad white ribbons of rivers: and in picking out the patches of cultivation, emerald and olive, ochre and lemon, in surprisingly square patterns that remind one of medieval diaper-work or the border of a Persian carpet. But for me the enjoyment of all this is spoiled by a vague sense that I have no right to be skimming so lightly and comfortably over those vast barriers—surely designed to cost man arduous exertions and perils.

Even as we crossed Luristan, I wearied of the spectacle below, and fell to writing Chapter Nine of this book. But I have already said

enough of my journey there, and it is time we came to ground at the airport in Persia.

I was welcomed with great hospitality and taken to the garden where the grass and trees—to say nothing of the ducks and duck-pond—were so reminiscent of distant England. I was only a little embarrassed to hear my friends launch so quickly into the somewhat monotonous chorus against what they considered to be the decadent, mendacious and contemptible race of the Persians. They even hoped that I would write something on the subject and help blazon it across the world.

I am often in a similar situation, and always at a loss. My hosts knew far more about the matter than I did. The five days I had to spend in the country are hardly adequate for solemn racial generalizations. I said that I thought Morell had already done most of the work for them in *Haji Baba of Ispahan*. I said that the only style of writing I had mastered was not well adapted to general vituperation. But for the most part I held my peace. I forbore to quote two things that were humming in my head—Burke's masterly 'I do not know how to draw up an indictment against a whole nation' and the more common-sense saying about there being good and bad in all places.

There is only one thing about which a cursory traveller through Persia can speak with some certitude—even if he must first apologize to the very great poet who provided me with a heading for this section of my book. Whatever is odious about the Persians, it is certainly not the *apparatus* of their lives. Terribly poor as most of them are, all show a real delight in beautiful things, and most seem to have some power of creating beauty. I have been told by those who know all parts of the country by long residence, that the knowledge of poetry there is quite remarkable, and that the most down-trodden rustics in remote places will quote Firdausi's verses at one when one least expects it. I could see for myself that the Tehran junk-shops were crammed with beautiful examples of craftsmanship, and seem hardly to admit into their windows such trash as Cairo and Beirut inflict on the passers-by. The furniture in cheap cafés and poor men's houses is painted rudely enough, but with a certain gaiety satisfying to the eye and also implying a considerable expenditure of time, trouble and expense. The same gay patterns decorate the curious and quite useless wooden hoops that are fixed to the shafts of the peasants' carts and make a decorative frame, after the Russian fashion. The Persians once had a reputation for artistic production

hardly challenged between Italy and China. If they are as degenerate as men say, they at least keep among them traces of that greatness from their past.

There were plenty of other things to make a superficial observer keep his eyes open and his thoughts astir. The streets were full of Russian officers and soldiers, to remind one that Tehran was now, in a sense, the extreme left wing of that vast array of which the right wing is lost in Lapland mists and the centre of which is, we hope, pressing inwards on Berlin. I presume the town has been open to Russian influences for at least a century, but, apart from the horse-hoops, there is little outward sign of this.

I do not know how and when Tehran displaced the older cities of the south as the capital of the country. I have been told that the transfer was ordered by some fairly recent Shah—an upstart who had once been a tribal leader among those northern uplands. Except for a few old lanes (ending in battered gateways as mysterious and enticing as those of Beirut), Tehran seems mostly of the same date as Birmingham or Cheltenham, with a quite unhistorical atmosphere not altogether different from theirs.

Apart from a short study of one short incident (which I would like to recount later), I know practically nothing about Persia's past. My hosts assured me that there was little worth knowing—that it must all be a tissue of corruption, knavery and lying. In so far as it was dominated by the customs and standards of the great mercantile cities, of Isfahan and Shiraz and Tehran, this may be true; but I would like to learn more of the history of the country-folk and of those who lorded it over them in days gone by.

I made one little excursion into rusticity, mostly motor-borne, which also involved a good short walk. I followed a delightfully tinkling stream, such as one sighs for in vain in Egypt, or even on Mount Lebanon in June. I passed through broken sunlight, under almost English-looking trees, elm and lime and ash. The village inn, if un-English, might easily have been European. Only the almond-eyed beauties who darted enticing looks at me from its veranda (but were insufficiently beautiful to warrant a halt) seemed characteristic and indigenous to the East.

My walk brought me all too quickly back to the tarmac-ed, telegraph-posted high-road, on which cars hum fast to Tehran. I turned back to await mine, in what Persians would call a garden, though I could better describe it as a walled grove of trees. Their tops rose

high above the high walls and waved leafy fingers in the breeze: their feet were hidden in grass, real, untidy green grass such as I had hardly ever seen for three years. And the little stream dodged and trickled between their roots.

I sat down to wait for my friend in the car. I was alone, and among trees, and happy. But even in such circumstances I cannot help thinking historically. I was glad to have escaped from towns and their atmosphere of lies and money-making. I imagined myself to be in some such primeval Persia as Herodotus tells of, breeding that race of horsemen whose education could be summed up under the three headings: 'To ride, to shoot straight and to tell the truth'.

### III. ASSASSINATION

THREE students once arrived at a University on the same day, and found themselves assigned to the same room as their sleeping quarters, on the first night of term. They were youths of widely different character and abilities, and though they soon struck up a friendship, they had little in common except in having their own way to make in the world.

The first soon proved to be of the stuff of which good administrators and civil servants are made. His patient ambition and diligence matched his talents. The professors at the University felt safe in predicting for him a successful career in government service.

The second was of a more artistic temperament, lazy and industrious by turns, but certainly careless of the small matters which add up into success in business or administration. He was extremely sceptical about religion and about the world in general. He was fond of women, and perhaps over-fond of the bottle. The only brand of learning to which he would give any steady application was the rather impractical one of astronomy. The stars seemed to please his sense of the poetry of life, and at the same time nourish his belief in its insignificance and final futility. He was hardly likely to make a sound position for himself in the world. He was certainly drinking too much, in a society that was nominally prohibitionist: he might even drink himself to death early in life, and then everyone would forget his name—a name which actually, by an odd chance, has now become familiar wherever the English language is spoken.

The third occupant of the common dormitory was of a much rarer,



though a well-recognized psychological type. He was of humble origin, but nourished insatiable ambitions. He had driving force, narrow and self-centred, yet of unusual intensity. He had a strong streak of Puritanism, and, where his own interests were concerned, a complete moral obliquity. Governing and twisting all was a grinding inferiority-complex, social and personal, which fed his will to power. He had a little in common with the prophet Muhammed (though without Muhammed's poetic vision and eloquence), but far more in common with Adolf Hitler. His malign psychological maladjustment was to have rather similar effects on the lives of many decent, innocent folk. Meanwhile he was an unpromising scholar, suspected of attending certain unorthodox gatherings upon which Authority frowned. The University pursed its lips, and was extremely dubious about its young pupil.

The three friends, still obscure and without backing in the great world outside, decided to strike a bargain with each other. Whichever of them first 'made good' and got into any position of comfort and influence, was to give his two former comrades a leg-up, and at least find each of them a job that would provide him with a competence. Wise after the event, we can see that the three-cornered agreement was also rather one-sided. The first of them was pretty certain to be in a position to help his friends, long before astronomy or poetry had brought grist to the second's mill, probably long before the third had found any *milieu* in which he could exercise his unattractive and dangerous powers.

It proved so in the event. The first, Nizam-i-Mulk, soon rose to be first minister—Grand Vizir as it was called—of the vast Seljuk Empire, which then (in the eleventh century) stretched from Afghanistan to the Black Sea. He was a benefactor and a great source of pride to the University of Nishapur, in which he had graduated. He found the poet a place as Astronomer-Royal, and galvanized him into sufficiently businesslike energy to assist in a badly needed and competently accurate Reform of the Calendar. In his spare time, the poet, whose name was Omar Khayyám, found leisure to write the quatrains which we call his *Rubáiyát*. He seems also to have had a salary sufficient to provide him with wine to drink and women to write about.

The third member of the trio, Hassan-i-Saleh, was a more difficult problem. To begin with, the police were already after him, largely because of his connection with the nonconformist Ismaili sect. I think I am right in saying he was an orphan (which may be the key

to his whole story) and had no relations to help him to keep on straight paths. The Vizir stopped the petty persecution of the police, and gave Hassan a government post. Hassan immediately began to intrigue for a better one, licking the boots of some of his superiors, and plotting to squeeze others out of their jobs. His meagre successes could only reach the fringe of his insensate ambition. They could not quench his smouldering grievance against a world that refused to recognize him as its greatest man. With a derangement that had grown almost maniacal, he challenged the position of the Vizir himself. His benefactor accepted the challenge with chivalrous or contemptuous promptitude, detected him in forging records to prove his own superiority, and threw him out of the office.

He became all the more dangerous in obscurity. No police vigilance could prevent his organizing his former Ismaili associates into a secret society, whose network covered the country. He recruited fanatics by some mixture of rhetoric and hypnotism and perhaps drugs, and sent them out to murder any official who seemed to get too hot on his trail. He dabbled in high politics (then undistinguishable from religion), and always his favourite weapon was murder. His emissaries went forth from the slums of Isfahan and Shiraz to strike down the highest in the land. When the organization began to need permanent headquarters, Hassan himself made his way to a fortified post at Alamut, perched high on a spur of mountain that hangs above the Caspian. There he half-browbeat, half-hypnotized the official in charge into giving him hospitality, and then, cuckoo-like, proceeded to eject him and his garrison out of the eagle's nest fortress. Troops coming to besiege its almost unassailable cliffs were held at bay by Hassan's young men, now in uniform (white gowns, not brown shirts), until a sufficient number of murders had disorganized their commissariat or their headquarters. There came, finally, the crisis of malignancy and spiteful ingratitude, far worse than the slaughter of von Roehm. A young man sallied forth at Hassan's orders and managed to bury a dagger in Nizam-i-Mulk himself. As the Vizir lay dying of the wound, he is said to have quoted, with his last breath, from one of Omar Khayyám's lines:

'I came like water, and like wind I go.'

Such was the foundation of the Assassins' power, and there is not sufficient evidence to show how far popular legend was right in attributing it to the use of hashish—how far it was a matter of that

oratory and pseudo-idealism which can turn young fools into criminals, whether in ancient Persia or modern Germany. Hassan-i-Saleh was the first Old Man of the Mountain, and his Syrian counterpart (contemporary with the Crusades) headed a smaller offshoot, which unfortunately survived long after the Mongol invader had extirpated the vermin from Alamut. But this same Syrian *Senex Montium* was said to range his young men in rows on the castle ramparts, whenever an important foreign ambassador came on a visit; then, to show his power, he would merely call out, "No. 1!" or, "No. 3!" and No. 1 or No. 3 would hurl himself headlong to death upon the flagstones of the courtyard.

Hassan himself did not live nearly long enough to be spitted, as he deserved, upon the Mongol spears. He reached the sere and yellow leaf, with his puritanical instincts growing stronger as his years increased. Having already put one of his two sons to death, he had the second slaughtered for introducing a bottle of wine into Alamut.

What prompted such atrocity, only the Devil can say. Hassan left a kind of diary, of which enough survives to show that he had long ceased to believe in the Ismaili theology or in any God at all. He had ceased to believe that there was, or could be, any ultimate Truth. He had come to inhabit and to ravage a meaningless world. A life of nihilistic crime had produced a wilderness of nihilism in his own tortured soul.

He had outdone his fellow-students in scepticism. Perhaps he, like Omar Khayyám, remembered the days of which he could say:—

‘Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Sage, and heard great argument,  
About it and about, yet evermore  
Came out by the same door as in I went.’

Omar Khayyám’s final philosophy—if Fitzgerald’s translation renders it faithfully—is, in all conscience, spiritually bankrupt enough. It attracts a certain number of modern people: it represents the world as one illimitable question-mark to which it is useless to seek an answer (thus saving them from the trouble of thinking). It represents all morality as a pathetic delusion (thus legitimizing any vice that happens to attract them). Omar seems to have no use for the moral sense, except when he can use it in rhetorical diatribes of moral indignation against his own Creator.

But if the poet's view of the world remains totally unsatisfying to anyone who has the courage and energy to think, it was at least a canvas on which he wove an intricate carpet of many-coloured poetry that has given delight to thousands. The empty chasm in Hassan-i-Salch's philosophy, filled with grievance for self and lust for self, drove him to such long years of tyranny and slaughter as left a large fraction of a continent terrorized by his minions and successors. God alone knows what havoc it wrought within the man's own soul.\*

\* The best book I know about Hassan-i-Salch is M. Bouthoul's 'Grand Maître des Assassins', most readable, admirably martialled and (I am told) reasonably accurate. The best book in which to study the psychological problem involved in the following poem is entitled 'Mein Kampf'.

### THE RUBÁIYÁT OF ADOLF HITLER

(August 1944)

#### I

Awake! For I am speaking. I, Whose might  
Sends armies forth, to put our foes to flight,  
Till, lo, from East to West the world resounds  
With German feet that tramp—left, right, left, right.

#### II

I, who Am Power, before whom all are dumb,  
Who drink no wine, at feasts crave but a crumb:—  
No woman's heels can tap upon My heart,  
Only the music of the (distant) drum.

#### III

Once was there one,—and blue the Danube roll'd  
By those green fields where, boy and girl, we stroll'd,—  
She could not match My star, scorned Me, and gave  
Her body to another—for his gold.

#### IV

Past and forgotten now! Sufficeth Power,  
Though men in rancour long delayed My hour,  
Thought to hold Me back, who was born a king,  
To crush the seed whence sprung this splendid flower.

## V

Myself when young did hesitate and ask  
(While others sought the harlot or the cask,  
And sneered at Me, whom Heaven had marked for fame)  
Unknowing what My end and what My task.

## VI

There was a Door to which I found no Key,  
There was a Veil through which I could not see,  
Till Fate bestowed the Vision, and redeemed  
My suffering country by the gift of Me.

## VII

Then those that sneered, those that usurped My due,  
As Time made all things clear, I knew, I knew,  
The scum that thwarted God and thwarted Me,  
Each one a Marxist and each one a Jew.

## VIII

My friends? *This* proved a rogue, and *that* a clown,  
Mere rungs to fit My feet, who sought a crown,  
Exiled or dead now. For they should have known  
That I, once up, must kick the ladder down.

## IX

With them the seed of Greatness did I sow  
But with My own hand wrought to make it grow  
And those who, in their place, slave for Me now,  
They come like water, and like wind they go.

## X

Even Benito—has not Fate now show'd  
I was *his* guide, not he Mine, on the road?  
Saved by My minions while his armies flee  
He craves from Me a refuge and abode.

## XI

And some I thought the usefulest and best,  
Generals whom War and Time had put to test,  
Have crossed My Will, had other plans than Mine,  
And one by one crept silently to Rest.

## XII

I ask no happiness, have none to give,  
I came not upon Earth that Man might live:  
I, the new Christ, was born that men might die,  
Ground, in their millions, through War's scarlet sieve.

## XIII

And yet,—and yet, if beside Danube's stream  
Her lamp had sparkled to My boyhood's gleam,  
Ten million dead, perhaps, were living still,  
And I, perhaps . . . No, 'tis a sickly dream!

## XIV

They say the English and the Yankees rain  
Bombs on My towns and camps like golden grain,  
Armies from Egypt toil past Rome, and tanks  
Roar round Orleans, round Warsaw! But in vain.

## XV

There have been no defeats—only a ruse  
To lure them further on. Doctor the news:  
Shift twelve divisions from the West to East,  
Twelve, East to West: and shoot ten thousand Jews!

## XVI

I am your God, your leader. Others fly,  
I stay—tho' thousands fall. (I must keep by  
A loaded pistol for My rainy day.)  
Meanwhile all's well. We conquer. I am I.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### POST-BAG

Here's a sigh for those that love me,  
And a smile for those that hate,  
And, whatever skies above me,  
Here's a heart for any fate.  
*Lines to Thomas Moore.*

#### I. ZERO

The Convent, Knayé, N. Syria.

20.00 Hrs.

*Saturday, 2 July, '44.*

MY DEAR MAJOR—

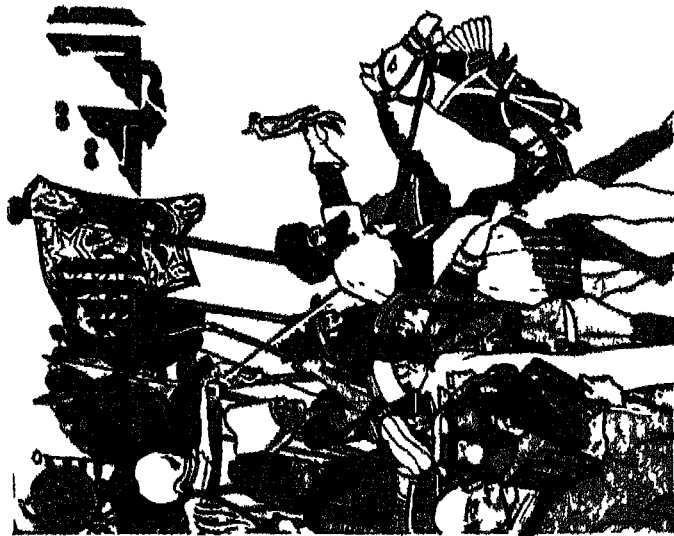
Many thanks for your note, but why on earth should you apologize? When I get a standing invitation, such as you once issued to me, I really don't expect it to mean that I can arrive practically unheralded on your doorstep and immediately be provided with meals and luxuries and a bed at half an hour's notice. I gave you a little more than that, ringing up from Aleppo, but I quite understood your difficulty, and was extremely lucky to get my two nights in your camp before coming on here to make room for your other guests. And if we cannot stay up half the night arguing, as we did last year, I am only a mile or two away, and I can at least come over and ride with you during the day.

I like arguing with you. You talk about things, not labels. I mean by this that when I say something provocative, you don't immediately answer, 'Oh, but that's rather a Bolshie remark, isn't it?' or, 'H'm. That's what the Dichards say!' I am glad to say that I provoke both these reactions, at different times and from different fools. I find them equally irritating. You do at least pay me the old-fashioned compliment of examining my statements, not to find out what party label you can affix to them, but in order to discover whether or no they are true. *O si sic omnes!*

By the way, I forgot to tell you one thing last night, when we were on the Crusades, and had mentioned again the name of our old friend Orgueilleuse de Hareng. It was only a little affair of a name, and of a coincidence.

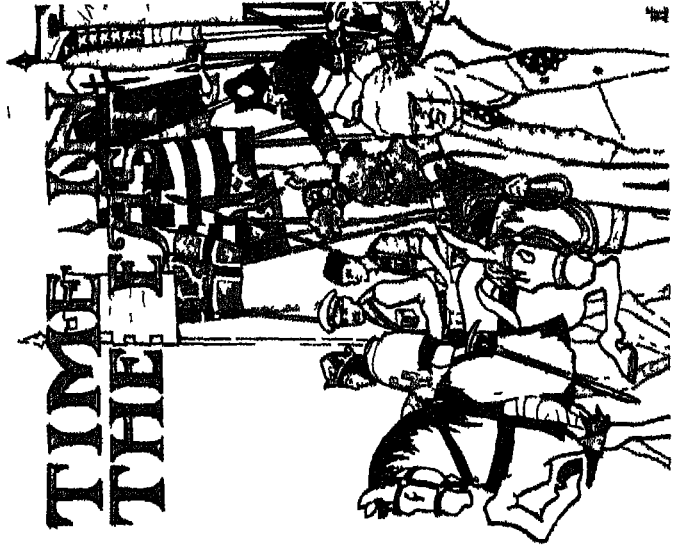






TRIPTYCH FROM THE MONASTERY OF KNAYE

TIME  
IN THE  
EAST  
BY  
EVAN  
JOHN



With apologies to Herbert Strang

I told you that soon after my five days in Persia, a certain most unexpected and decisive crisis overtook me. The decision in some part lay with me, and it had to be made on my way up here, when I had so managed my journey as to give me a night in my beloved Jerusalem. I went for a ride in the evening on a broken-down old mare that I hired from a stable near the Jaffa gate. I took her over that very rocky little hill where the windmill stands, and dismounted there for ten minutes, to sit down and think over the problem that was vexing me. I'm pretty sure now that I came to the wrong decision. Well, do you know what they called that particular little hill south of Mount Sion, in the days when the Crusaders held Jerusalem? I've just read in one of the monastery books that they called it '*Le Mont du Mauvais Conseil*'.

There's only one good point about the imps who haunt it and gave me bad counsel. It's more than likely that their activities will end in getting me packed home to England. And though I shan't like saying good-bye to you and to all my other good friends out here, nor even to some of the work I shall have to leave unfinished, I have a wife and children at home whom I haven't seen for three years. . . .

It is getting late, and I've had a busy evening. Being here alone at nights may cut me off from the chance of argument with you and from the historical and poetical exchanges which proved such fun last summer, but it does give me an opportunity to write. No, I don't mean only letters home (such as I must embark on tomorrow, when I've finished this Collins to you). I mean the book on the East that I told you about. Monastic seclusion is even better than the quiet of my Cairo *pension*, and I'm getting some arrears off my pen.

I'm even finishing some of the illustrations I've planned for it, and a rather elaborate dust-jacket. I fancy my publisher will say it's *too* elaborate, and a little too like the cover of a children's book to attract the particular kind of purchaser that we'll have to angle for. Never mind, maybe I'll persuade him to print it as one of the illustrations. I've managed to find place in it for most of the celebrities that honour my book with their names—Hiroshige, Nebuchadnezzar, Thothmes, Omar Khayyám, Hassan-i-Saleh, Hitler, Fakr-al-Din, and Saladin—Baldwin IV, my Beirut C.O., you, Napoleon, G.K.C., and Don Quixote. It's been good fun trying (and failing) to get recognizable likenesses of that bunch.

Painting Omar's rubicundity reminds me of a lesson you've helped

me to re-learn in your Mess—namely that only fools sleep later than 6 a.m., or drink earlier than 6 p.m. I myself am frequently a fool, but I always regret my slug-a-bed mornings and lunchtime potations. I last mentioned Omar in my book to accuse him of “spiritual bankruptcy”. The reason is obvious. Look at the first three quatrains. The fellow very properly rose with the sun, but he seems to have started on the drink before breakfast.

St. Francis guards me from any such follies here. I shall be spiritually more than solvent soon, in this bare, clean room. But it contains all I need, and nothing I don’t. It could be listed thus, Army fashion:—

|                       |                         |                    |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Beds . . . . . 1   | 3. Chairs, Wooden 1     | 5. Prie-dieu . . 1 |
| 2. Tables . . . . . 1 | 4. Basins, Enamel . . 1 | Other Articles 0   |

At the present moment, and in my present mood, I find the list absolutely satisfying. I am tired and shall soon be getting into item No. 1, after (don’t laugh at me) a brief use of No. 5. You know my antediluvian habits. But I certainly need nothing else to keep me happy.

So I’ll say ‘Good-night’, and hope we may get one or two more good rides together—unless the summons I’m rather expecting comes through tomorrow. This is the first leave I’ve had for a year (apart from our exhilarating day and a half at Christmas) but I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if they cut it short.

And that reminds me,—I am still wondering whether or no to post a certain letter I showed you. You were very emphatic that it was best left unposted, that it could do no good, that most people reading it would take it for the work of a man drunk or mad.

You know I wrote it cold sober, and as sane as I ever was. You can probably appreciate my motive for sending it, which is simple enough, though it had to work through devious and fantastic channels.

I hope you will also remember that if it begins with defiance, it ends with a most sincerely-meant olive-branch. I have the same duties towards my fellow-creatures as we are all born with, though I find that I have to carry them out by methods that seem strange to others. My duty towards one of my fellow-creatures is plain, and I can see only one way of carrying it out, by sending the letter in question. I know no other way of driving home into his mind the enormity, as well as the villainy, of something he has done. But I’ll sleep on it before I rewrite and post it.

I'm going to say 'Good-night' now, and crawl straight into my lumpy-looking monastic bed. You can be sure that I shall sleep soundly, and, before I drop off, wish you and your regiment and your horses, every good wish a drowsy man can think of. And remember, please, no apologies from you.

Yours most sincerely,

EVAN JOHN.

## II. INCOGNITO

as from G.H.Q. M.E.F.

2 July, '44.

SIR—

My C.O. has recently received a communication, signed with your name, containing certain practically baseless accusations, the truth of which, in detail or substance, you have not taken the slightest trouble to investigate.

I entertain, and have frequently expressed, the highest admiration for the public work of your office. Where it is a question of collecting and sifting evidence against a criminal, nothing could exceed the care and precision with which you collect and collate facts, demanding confirmation of Time, date, place and circumstance from every available source. But when you wish to slander a friend and a guest, you are apparently content to accept the first string of slipshod lies that is brought to you. You ignore their improbabilities and inconsistencies, and you append your signature to the results, without any thought for the consequences to others or to yourself.

I am, unfortunately, a fencer of some 25 years' constant practice, and any contest between us with sharp weapons is likely to be a one-sided affair, promptly ending in whatever painful and humiliating form of death I might see fit to inflict upon you. I am less expert with the pistol. I am therefore writing to invite you to fire as many bullets as you shall stipulate at my body, provided that I may simultaneously have the very great pleasure of firing an equal number at yours.

You will find it difficult to believe that this offer is sent in all sincerity, and in the firm resolve to overcome the grave practical difficulties we might meet in arranging the affair,—should you prove willing to play your part. I must ask you to remember that I am by profession a historian. I believe that our ancestors were not such

fools as we sometimes like to think them, especially when they decided that certain social evils demand a drastic and surgical treatment; and that no man should be permitted to take away another's character without thereby incurring the risk of physical agony and death.

At the same time I would like to repeat a remark whereby, I believe, I have already irritated you—namely, that I am a Christian. This time I mean by it that I know of no pleasure greater than that of according a prompt and ungrudging pardon to any man who asks it of me, for any wrong he may have done. This pleasure would be increased if such accordance should lead to a *mutual* recognition of mistakes and a rebuilding of that mutual respect which you, sir, have so wantonly and contemptuously destroyed.

Until such time, I must remain, Sir,

Your sincere enemy,

E. J. SIMPSON,

Captain, 201023.

### III. CONDISCIPULO

A Monastery in Syria,

4.45 a.m. *July 3rd, 1944.*

DEAR PAUL,

Dawn is just coming up, an orange and lemon-yellow dawn, from behind the Syrian mountains on which my window looks out. It does not yet give me enough light to write by, so I have set a match to the oil lamp I blew out before I fell asleep five hours ago. I have got out of bed because it is so much more tiring to lie there thinking of things one wants to write, than to get up and write them.

You are the oldest of my friends, and have been one ever since your mother corrupted my little soul with a bright new half-crown on the cricket field of our Prep. School. I owe you and her more than that small sum of money. I have frequently dined out on the strength of one or two of your *bons mots*, which have perhaps slipped from your own memory, but remain fresh and delightful in mine.

The first was occasioned by our common admiration for that masterpiece of poetic history, Benét's *John Brown's Body*, and by my trite praise for the author's impartiality as between Northerners and Southerners in the American Civil War. I well remember the expression of mock astonishment on your face as you answered, "Im-

partial? Why, he's violently prejudiced on both sides!" You gave me thereby not only a good laugh, but also a lesson in history-writing from which even Gibbon and Macaulay might have profited.

The second was as funny, but had less profound implications. I had come up to London with two painful bee-stings on my shin, and you, in your new Temple quarters, were explaining to me the kind of work you had taken up, including the procuring of legal Injunctions. I said lightly that I wished you could get an Injunction issued to restrain my mother's bees from stinging me. You left the proper weighty pause before replying, with, I believe, unimpeachable legal accuracy:—"A hive of Bees not being a Corporation recognized by the Law, an Injunction will have to be issued against each several bee."

For these and other delights, I owe you much recompense, and I hope you will find some of it in this book. You have recently flattered me, in correspondence, by suggesting that some of my letters might serve as a basis for articles in *Blackwood's* or some similar periodical. Maybe I could have earned an honest guinea or two by acting on your idea, but, on the whole, I am glad that I have hoarded my little store of memories and reflections until I could make of them a book worthy the consideration of such wise men as you. Most of the poems have already appeared in print, without earning me even a half-guinea; and the *Eastern Times* of Beirut once comically misprinted and mis-edited an article I wrote on the Crusades which now appears in chastened form in Chapter III. The rest is new, to all except the friends who wade through my long private letters.

I also wish to thank you for a piece of hospitality you showed me at a recent crisis in my life. You were happily married when I left England, and there was something peculiarly appropriate in making my last preparations and purchases from the London house which Betty had made into so pleasant a home. For you, even more than for me, the departure of a soldier for the Levant has some special and symbolic significance, some memory clinging to it of those many ancestors of our race who went out, to face far greater dangers and hardships than any I have encountered, under the crusading banners of our faith. I think that for both of us the romantic heart of this world lies buried in some castle, in some forest, on some Syrian mountainside, not unlike those I can now see, touched to splendour by the swiftly-rising sun.

It was with great pleasure that I heard that your home had been

completed by the coming of a little son. I was pleased and flattered by your request that I should be his godfather, and you are perhaps one of the few people left in the world who can fully understand my motives for refusing. To me a ceremony is either a ceremony or it is nothing. Since I could not myself be present when your child was enlisted into the greatest of all armies, I preferred to stand aside in favour of those who were able to attend.

Be this as it may, I shall always be glad of news of his progress, and never reluctant to give him such help and counsel as an old fool can offer to a young one. I hope he will one day read and appreciate the postcard that I wrote for *li petit chevaliers* (I believe that is the singular in Crusader-French) on the topmost turret of the great castle of Krak des Chevalliers. I hope he will one day visit these parts, and perhaps write a better book about them than I am contriving to do myself.

The sun is now high above the hills, and my lamp is out. The little kestrels are swooping away from the monastery caves, and donkeys bray in the village. It is time I finished my letter, dressed, shaved, and thought about putting in an appearance at chapel, if only to say a few words of thanks. God is at present showering on me a multitude of blessings, great and little, and setting His seal upon them by the gift of that peace of mind which alone permits us to use them aright. May I send you my most heartfelt wishes that He has no cause at present to withhold them from you, or Betty or baby Mark, and that soon we may all meet and make merry together? Such is the constant wish and the not infrequent prayer, of

Your old and grateful friend

EVAN JOHN SIMPSON.

#### IV. MEMENTO

Franciscan Convent

Knayé, N. Syria

8.30 a.m. Sunday

July 3rd, 1944.

MY DEAREST MOTHER,

It is Sunday morning and I have just paid a short visit, of courtesy and interest, to the Mass that my good hosts are celebrating for their villagers. I was not tempted to linger. I feel much sympathy for Roman doctrine and discipline, and I have many good friends among the priests and laymen of the Roman Catholic Church. But I am as

much repelled as you by the gilt and tinsel, the unintelligible murmurings of its ceremonies. Nor have I ever found good reason to change over from that Anglican faith in which you, dear Mother, grounded your three sons so well.

I have now climbed the stairs and am back in my little white-washed room. From time to time (as is only right in a house dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi) a bird flies into my window, expecting to find the guest-chamber as empty as usual. I am no longer afraid of a bird in the room, as I was in childhood, and I wish my visitors would stay longer. But Man, for them, has the brand of Cain upon him, and we cannot all win to the sainthood that might quiet their fears and earn their friendship.

I am looking out on a view that would, I think, remind you of those Greek and Italian landscapes with which you grew familiar in your early days. There are olive groves, a few sparse vineyards and dark-green or tawny hills. I have recently left, and hope soon to return to, an atmosphere which would remind you of your earlier childhood, an atmosphere of tents and horse-lines, of forage-waggons and dark-skinned Asian N.C.O.s—'Non-coms,' as you learned to call them in those far-off days. My friends in the camp are cavalrymen and your father was, of course, a gunner—the first, I believe, who discovered a way to unscrew the gun barrels of his seven-pounders and load them upon mules. You yourself are the only woman known to have held Her Majesty's commission in the Royal Regiment of Artillery—though the young subaltern who filched and forged that jocose document in your name deserved a good dressing-down for his prank. But you learned in early childhood to bestride a nobler animal than the mule, and you will understand what great pleasure I am deriving from the daily feel of a *horse* between my knees, in place of the poor four-footed trash that one hires for six-and-eight-pence an hour in the livery stables of Cairo or Jerusalem.

You recently sent me—with many most unnecessary hesitations and apologies—a charming photograph of yourself as you now are. It stands by my bed in a battered leather frame. The face is a little sadder than I could wish it, though I know well that the sight of an unusual flower or bird, the sound of a fine line of poetry, or the cracking of a good joke, can still transform it instantaneously with the sunniest of smiles. If part of your sadness is due to the fear that all which was good in your world seems now to have passed away, I am writing to reassure you that it still survives, certainly in these



odd corners of the earth, possibly nearer to your own house in Oxfordshire than you might imagine.

I will not presume to console you for the loss of that kindly scholar and most whimsically amusing gentleman who was such a good father to his three sons. I could only do so by repeating the trite but (for me) most deeply-felt assurance that you will undoubtedly meet and be happy with him again. It was perhaps from him that I derived my literary ambitions and, if his were thwarted by necessity and circumstance, I am sure he is now helping the Recording Angel's bureau to enliven the margins of celestial files with the same kind of witty and yet profound comment as used to amuse or scandalize his colleagues in Whitehall.

I think I could both please you and touch your heart if I could tell you how many of my present activities (and maybe the best of them) are but developments from the playtime of the child you bore. The picture I am now designing as a dust-jacket for my book is really derived from a schoolboy daub of horsemen and banners which, I believe, still rears its ugly head among the photographs on your bedroom mantelpiece. And if you could see me taking lessons from one of the Asian Non-coms in the management of sword and lance from the saddle (nominally to assist my historical researches into the cavalry tactics of the twelfth century) you would easily recognize the small boy who used to spear imaginary enemies with a long bamboo, as he pedalled his bicycle round the gravel paths of our garden.

You will find in this book much that is familiar and *réchauffé* from my letters, some things which are new to you. Wisely or unwisely, I have always striven to hide from you the mental struggles in which I have become a combatant against myself. I wanted to save you from unnecessary pain. These struggles did, I fear, accentuate and increase the inevitable estrangements that part all sons from all mothers—us two in smaller degree than most. They sharpened the occasional jangles which no pair of highly strung persons can possibly hope to avoid. I hope to come back to you with a somewhat healthier mind, the better son and companion that you have a right to expect.

There is one capital matter on which there has never been any estrangement between us. I am a man because you brought me into the world. I am no less clearly a writer because (bred among sons of the sword) you have never ceased to help and encourage me to acquire, through twenty years of unremitting effort, such small skill with the pen as I now possess.

When my first faltering play was about to come to production on a London stage, it was you who spent the long hours cutting out and sewing dull-coloured costumes, while I had the fun of painting bright patterns on them. It was you, not I, who were so excited as the time drew near, when you had to sit obscurely in a darkened stall, as I strutted the boards in one of our co-operated robes, and accepted, at the fall of curtain, more applause than my poor lines deserved.

It has been the same with my histories and novels. I have to thank you for many unwearied hours of listening to my experimental readings-aloud at you: for encouragement to try again when repeated failure spelled discouragement: for far more praise than was my due, at moments when even ill-deserved praise was strengthening to the spirit.

The family motto of your fighting ancestors was *Je suis loyal*. When you meet them (and I hope you won't do so for a long time yet) you'll be able to tell them that (*autres temps, autres mœurs*) you have been more loyal to your son's vocation as a writer than ever he has contrived to be himself. Make 'em laugh with that.

Since this letter is to be printed in a book, may I end it on that note rather than on a more intimate one?

May God bless you, my dearest Mother, for having made me what I am: for having had faith in those enthusiasms of mine which the world has occasionally conspired to ridicule or crush: and for now following me across lands and seas with such good wishes and prayers as few mothers give to undeserving sons. When I mount my horse tomorrow for a gallop over the Syrian hillsides, I will give a little thought to the charming old lady whose portrait stands by my bedside, but more to that girl who used to thunder along the slopes of the Himalayas when all the world seemed young. As I come to the last page of this book I shall remember that it is what it is because of you, and wish it were worthier of its origin.

And so *au revoir* until we meet again and I can again be in person what now I can only be on paper.

Your loving son and friend,  
EVAN.

3 July, 1944.

G.H.Q. M.E.F.

MY DEAR CHAP,

Many, many thanks for the copy of Stephen Haggard's *I'll Go To Bed At Noon*, which arrived, aptly, when I was just setting out on a long railway journey (I'm on leave now), poorly provided with mind-fodder. As you may have heard, the title of the book proved tragically prophetic. Poor Stephen died out here soon after joining us in M.E.F.

His wife is neighbour to mine in the country, and I once acted with him in a season at the Playhouse. I have seen him act elsewhere a dozen times, and I know no one who gave such consistently satisfying and frequently brilliant performances. His book gave me much pleasure, and much to think about, on my journey up here. I think it's a most promising piece of writing. I hope you won't consider that criticism a patronizing one. I hope you won't think I'm looking your gift-horse too discourteously in the mouth, if I confess to a slight disappointment. I wouldn't do so, but for a feeling that a closer inspection of the animal's teeth might lead to a rather interesting discussion, in which I hope you'll bear your part by answering this letter.

Perhaps it isn't really disappointment I felt in reading Stephen's book, so much as disagreement. I think I'm as good as most men at distinguishing between a man's literary talents and his convictions, his philosophy: I can read some of Somerset Maugham, and much of H. G. Wells, with the keenest pleasure and warmest admiration, while maintaining my private opinion that their philosophy (or lack of one) is beneath contempt. But we are only men, with intellects at the mercy of our tastes and prejudices. There isn't one of us who can appreciate to the full the intellectual or artistic products of a mind with which we are fundamentally at odds.

What is the barrier that keeps me apart from Stephen Haggard, and prompts me to pay his writing such grudging praise?

I think it is the same wall that divides the whole modern world into two halves. It may always have done so, under different labels, whose history is now too complex and too subterranean to trace. It has grown clear to our century, was indeed growing clearer all through the last, ever since that queer collection of bishops and

Radicals who called themselves the Utilitarians began their tactful propaganda which has now transformed and captured the minds of millions, perhaps of the majority of educated mankind. It is, none the less, still difficult to state the conflict in words. Perhaps it is best hinted at by quotations, and I'll give you two from the two Victorian writers who seem to me to be most undeniably on the two different sides of this particular fence. The first is John Stuart Mill, and he wrote (I think in his *Essay on Liberty*) a passage, very relevant, which I can only misremember and misquote. It was during a discussion on moral standards, and Mill says something about not being so foolish as to admire old-fashioned virtues, such as courage, when the environment which they had been fostered to combat had altogether passed away. The second is Browning's description of that same environment as:—

Machinery just meant  
To give thy soul its bent. . . .  
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

And he answers the argument about Time and Change, with the definitely discourteous

Fool! All that *is*, at all,  
Lasts ever, past recall.

You could hardly get a sharper contrast in outlook between two men writing in the same epoch. Am I beginning to show you what I mean about a similar modern contrast, about the disagreement (or is it merely a misunderstanding?) that sunders Maugham and Wells and Stephen Haggard from such poor mugs as Browning and me?

No, please don't start talking about religion. You'll only make confusion worse confounded. Of the men and women who are on my side of the wall today, a very large proportion would probably be Roman Catholics. Browning loathed and despised the Roman Catholic Church. So what? Let's leave religion out of it and go on talking literature. Examine *Homo Sapiens* only as an animal that can be moved or left cold, enlightened, puzzled or roused, bored or driven to desperate acts of self-sacrifice and crime by the literary products of his fellow-animals. But he has grave difficulty in disentangling the literary appeal from the appeal to mutual convictions

and prejudices. And the latter are for ever over-balancing his judgment without his knowing it. Specimen A can, like me, read such a book as Maugham's *Summing Up*, find the first half (in which Maugham describes the formation and slow sharpening of his literary talent) as breathlessly absorbing as any novel, and yet have great difficulty in yawning his way through the second half (an attempt to state a philosophy of Life) wondering how on earth a man can live through so much of the same Life and then write so much rubbish about it. But to Specimen B, Maugham's every utterance is of priceless value, to be mentioned in the same breath (and that a bated one) as the oracles which issue from the topmost and inmost shrine, where H. G. Wells and Bertrand Russell sit and direct Humanity down the paths it so mulishly refuses to follow. This Specimen B is meanwhile utterly unaffected by such a quatrain as I have put at the head of this chapter. He cannot understand how I can think it a scrap of profound wisdom, infinitely moving in its simplicity, such as only the greatest poets leave behind them. To him it is a trifle, possibly a slightly distasteful trifle: doggerel bravado from a seedy Scottish peer; just Lord Byron doing his stuff.

It's a mystery, isn't it?

Of course, it is the mark of my kind of beast that we rather like mysteries. We certainly prefer them to the floods of specious explanations which stop so many folk from thinking at all. We like to go on wondering and pondering, finding it more profitable, as well as more scientific. The past history of Science is a rubbish-heap of discarded explanations, still mounting daily, which were once proved (to the prover's satisfaction) to cover all the facts. They are now picturesque or ridiculous relics. That history is still in its infancy—if rubbish-heaps have infancies—and a time may soon come when all the modern explanations of the age-old mysteries will begin to look sillier than the medieval *strata* of rejects. The best of our scientists look in all directions for their materials, and it is curious how many of them are wisely beginning to look backwards too.

I have recently been listening to a long and boring disquisition from a bespectacled Jew on the subject that he was pleased to label Schizophrenia. I feel that it may not be long before we refuse to allow such bleating idiots to overawe us and confuse our thinking with long words. We might even start to investigate the very mysterious facts that lie behind the label in question by rediscovering the most important of them, scientifically thrashed out in a novel

by an almost medieval Spaniard: he studied the two halves of man's mind by isolating them in two separate bodies, and calling them Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

Do you remember what the first said about courage? I've started quoting and I can hardly stop myself going on to one of my favourites, the magnificently ironical—

I know well what the wise men tell us, that true courage is as the golden mean between excessive caution and excessive temerity. And yet, methinks, "This knight is rash and foolhardy", hath a better sound in the ear than "This knight is timid and cowardly".

I grow irrelevant. I am writing and have nearly finished a new book which is full of apparent irrelevancies, and includes a few real ones. I might print this letter among the former. I hope you'll find other matter in the book that is more amusing. There'll be too much in it, for your taste, about my physical recreations, riding and walking and fencing. There'll be too much bestriding of my intellectual hobby-horses, particularly the historical one. Remember there may be readers, on the other sides of various fences from you, who may find interest on pages that you rightly skip in boredom. "We are all" (dare I quote Sancho Panza this time?)—"We are all as God made us, and generally a good deal worse."

If I write more, I'll only quote more, and probably grow wildly irrelevant. So I'll just renew my thanks to you for *I'll Go To Bed At Noon*, and hope that it may soon be followed by some book you've written or are writing now. Expect, some day, an answering copy of *Time In The East*. However much the philosophy and opinions in it may stir your indignation or contempt, you may be interested in the way they are put together. At least we are at one in this—that neither of us thinks anything ever the worse for having trouble taken over it. I have been at this book for two years and more, and I wouldn't like to say how often, in that time, I have left the supper table to write or revise, and found myself still writing or revising when the smell of bacon and eggs (we're hardly rationed here) warned me that breakfast was approaching. Anyone who cares can say that my work stinks of the midnight oil; but I don't like hearing that any honest man thinks it glib or ill-considered. May the Midsummer Night's fairies be bringing you as many of their treasures to hammer into shape as I have been laboriously mis-hammering by Syrian lamp-

light! But this evening I am for an earlier bed. I have only one more letter to write, and then I can sleep with a reasonably good conscience.

The same to you, and good night.

Yours in friendship,

EVAN JOIN.

#### VI. CON AMORI

The Franciscan Friary,  
Knayé, N. Syria.

8 p.m.

*July 3rd, 1944.*

MY DARLING DOROTHY,

My second evening here is now drawing to a close, and this is the last letter in my post-bag. By both literary and family standards, it should be the best: but it can hardly be that, because our mutual best is far too intimate for public print. Balance the dull things I am about to write with those warm endearments, memories and hopes that I send in more private letters: and remember that both come from an exceedingly full heart.

Since I came out East, I have occasionally had the duty and privilege of censoring letters from 'Other Ranks', not only from my own F.S.W. men, scholars who can often write a better letter than I can, but also from the less articulate privates and gunners of other units who are forced to rely on 'Hoping this finds you as it leaves me', and on the pathetic pattern of final crosses which are so poor a substitute for the real embrace. Such letters are as private as confessions made to a priest, and I would not dream of divulging their specific contents. But their writers will bear me no grudge if I say, in general, that I have learned from them a great lesson in true Humility. I have also learned to be grateful for the fact that you and I have been enabled to lighten the load of a three-year separation by putting so much of ourselves, articulate and unembarrassed, into the letter we have exchanged. To complain of such separation is to be reminded again of that Eastern proverb which perhaps bears a second quotation: "I had no shoes, and I grumbled. Then I met a man who had no feet."

There is some hope now that this separation may soon be coming to an end, but while there's war in this world, we must be ready for

disappointment, and we would be wise not to build on anything except our own patience and resolution.

It is even possible that we might never meet again in this particular world, and I can leave you no parting instructions for such a mischance. We know and trust each other too well for any such instructions to be necessary.

Having had no brothers, and little knowledge of young boys, you might feel anxious about the best method of bringing up our son. If you trust your own instincts, and the demands of each passing year, I do not think you will go far wrong. I have not even any last message for him or his little sister. One day, when they are old enough, you could give them a copy of this book, so that they could learn what manner of man their father was.

No, on second thoughts, I have one message for them, and perhaps especially for David. It is not, perhaps, a thought of earth-shaking importance, and yet it keeps recurring to me nowadays and demanding expression. It is certainly not one that one can hear expressed at a boys' school, where all such heresies are carefully suppressed. Is it this—that I believe more Beauty and Justice and Kindness are destroyed by the fear of ridicule, than by the fear of death: and that the angels must weep daily bucketfuls of tears over the things that men and women hesitate to do for fear that other men and women might laugh at them. I wonder what David will make of that. If he tries to put it into practice, he's in for an interesting, but rather a tough life.

It's time I stopped being ponderous and parental. It's time I wound up this letter, and on some different note. I'd like it to be one of hope.

It may be years before we meet again. It may be only months—or weeks. Who knows? I've heard they're shipping home a lot of men. I might be in the next batch, I suppose. I might get orders through, at any time, to pack my things up and get off to sea. But there's no point in keeping up this rhyme in Wilhelmina Stitch prose-poetry. Verse should be verse, and why not print it so? (Exactly at what point did you discern that this *was* doggerel?) Well, here we go. Stanzas. A title? Shall we say:



## ? RETURN ?

This to my wife—and she deserves the best  
 A man can give a woman. Let me try  
 'To send my thoughts poetically dressed  
 In some such wings as may help thoughts to fly.

Three thousand miles before their journeyings cease,  
 Miles of blood-sodden land, blood-tinted foam—  
 Oh, million hearts that yearn in vain for Peace,  
 Even more sorely than we ache for Home!

Before you know, I might be on the sea  
 (No time to write, not even time to wire):  
 And in a week, ten days at most, may be  
 Riding full tilt for home through Oxfordshire.

Yes, I must ride a horse. Just before dawn  
 You'll hear the throb of hooves, leap out of bed,  
 And see beneath you, on the twilight lawn,  
 A gawky biped on a quadruped.

It'll be me. 'Neath trees whose leaves still hang  
 In summer splendour. I'll not come to find  
 'Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang'  
 But thrushes calling, still with green enshrined.

And you'll come hurrying down, just as you are,  
 Past silent rooms, to turn the front door key,  
 Open, and let the waning morning star  
 See you come running out in *déshabille*.

Leave it at that. I fear that others might  
 Find merely boring what's mere Heaven to us,  
 Kisses on doorstep.—"Children both all right?"  
 "Yes."—"Anything for breakfast?"—"Oh, don't fuss!"

I shall be home, with you I chose for wife  
Fifteen years back, loving a face, a voice,  
And after sharing that much of our life,  
*Have never yet repented of my choice.*

My dream for three years now. Time's tardy foot  
Has dragged still slower while I'm far from you.  
But what I've dreamed in Cairo and Beirut  
Somehow, some-when, in England will come true.

Join me in dreaming of that coming day,  
And cheat Time's dreary frown by putting on  
Your merriest smile. I may be far away,  
But I *do* love you.

And *am* coming.  
JOHN.

# INDEX

NOTE.—I have now contrived to write some two hundred pages on the subject of Time with only one passing reference to Mr. J. W. Dunne, and no discussion of the question which looks like vexing all of us a good deal during the next half-century, namely, whether Time is an old gentleman with a scythe, an un-quadratic equation, or a blind spot in the human mind. I leave it for wiser heads than mine. Meanwhile, I am appending Time's thumb-marks, in the shape of dates, to such names in the Index as will clarify or strengthen the view of Temporal precesses which is implied in the book. Where it is a matter of Kings, the years are those of their Majesties' reigns: where of humbler folk, those of their entrance into our daylight, and departure into the ampler time-scheme of the Home which awaits us all.

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